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THE SEALSKIN CLOAK

THE SEALSKIN CLOAK

BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

AUTHOR OF "ROBBERY UNDER ARMS," "THE MINER'S RIGHT," ETC.

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THE SEALSKIN CLOAK

CHAPTER I

"PROMISE me not to be away more than a month, darling, will you not?" He was a tall, fair, well-dressed man who thus spoke to a lady equipped for a journey. They stood close together on the platform of the London Bridge railway on a winter evening. His face was eager, the tone of his voice almost imploring, as he continued, "I cannot help thinking, Marguerite, that you might have avoided this wretched journey altogether."

"Yes, Hugh, and avoided, as you call it, at the same time, the clearest, the most sacred duty."

As she answered, her husband—for such he was—marked almost with pain her resolved air, that tranquil expression of the features which tells the gazer more emphatically than words that there is no hope of change.

With a quick gesture as of renunciation, he whispered, "My darling! you possess every virtue under the sun; but some wicked old fairy threw down a root of obstinacy at your christening. However, we have argued it out, and I never knew you change at the eleventh hour. Come back as quickly as you can. The poor children will be so lonely, and I—but of course it does not matter."

"Hugh! oh, my own one!" said the woman, turning towards him a face with every feature working piteously in a brave attempt to subdue strong emotion.

"Do you not think that I suffer? that my inmost heart is not wrung with the sacrifice—almost the wrong I do you in leaving my home for any reason? But were I to fail Aunt Angela in her sore need—were she now to die untended, uncared for—I should feel myself a guilty wretch for evermore. You could not love a wife so basely ungrateful, Hugh, you know you could not?"

"You have always been too good, too high-souled for my companionship, dearest," he said, pressing her to his heart. "And you can talk me round at any time, you know well; but, in truth, I have a frightful presentiment of evil. May God keep us all from harm, and preserve for me my life's chief treasure! Here you will find me, on the spot at this minute, when the four weeks are over."

The scream of the approaching train drowned the wife's last words, as she threw herself into her husband's arms, clung wildly to his breast, then tore herself away after one last convulsive caress. The tears were streaming down her face as they walked together to the carriage. There they sat mutely gazing into one another's eyes, even after the warning bell had sounded, and the inexorable official, opening the door for the last time, had looked menacingly at the passengers. Then only Hugh Gordon left his wife's side, and walked stolidly on to the platform.

"Write from Paris," he said huskily.

"From Marseilles, rather," she replied. "I shall go right through; the sooner there the sooner back. *Pensez à moi.*"

She strove to smile reassuringly as the train moved off, but the effort was a failure. As Hugh Gordon gazed long and fixedly at his wife's figure through the open window he saw that she had buried her face in her hands.

He could see the sealskin cloak which she wore—the dark travelling dress; he treasured then every detail in his mind as he had never done before. It was the first time they had been parted since their marriage, and for some reason or fancy of his own he had felt beyond all expression unwilling to consent to the apparently trivial separation.

"Hang all aunts, particularly when they are angels!" he blurted out irritably. "Why the deuce should she have chosen this particular time to fall ill in the south of France, to require so costly a sacrifice as Marguerite's attendance? Only for that abominable scarlet fever we should have taken the children. Anything would have been better than this horrible loneliness."

Hugh Gordon and his wife had been married five years, during which time they had never had a divided purpose, though they may have differed as to the means whereby such purpose should be carried out. And in good sooth was she a wife "worth, how well" all care and tendance. In appearance eminently attractive and striking, tall and graceful, with a wealth of bright brown hair, and wondrous eyes of the darkest shade of hazel, Marguerite Gordon was one of those women who might have been wooed and won for her personal loveliness alone. But fair as was her external form, it was the least important factor in the sum of her attributes. Time might impair the delicacy of the transparent complexion, and dim the lustre of those eyes so proudly eloquent, but the warm, true heart, and tender, unselfish love which, like lamps within a shrine, were fed by the very sources of her being, could suffer neither change nor decay. The high courage which led to a disdainful contempt for obstacles might be chastened by experience. The lofty disregard of the meaner trials of life might be softened into resignation. And he who was the happy custodian of this pearl of womanhood, this jewel of great price, would find as life wore on that its lustre would be enhanced and its intrinsic value demonstrated only the more clearly by the attrition of the world's hard and bitter experience.

This had not been the verdict of the friendly critics of society—those judges who sit on all our cases, in private courts, wherein our manners and morals, our duties and destinies are discussed, whence verdicts issue from which there is no appeal. But Hugh Gordon knew and prized his wife's virtues at their proper value; he despised all other estimates, and he thanked God in his heart almost every hour of the day for the mercy which had accorded him so wondrous a possession.

Her being in a manner compelled to perform a long railway journey through a foreign land, if France at this time of day can be so designated, was but the result of her temperament and circumstances. Marguerite Wynn, with a brother and sister, had been left an orphan early in life. Her father, a handsome, talented *roué*, after consuming her mother's fortune and breaking her heart in the process, had gracefully departed this life when there was no more money to spend or evil to be compassed.

At this all-important juncture it was Aunt Angela who had hastened to perform the mother's part to the forlorn children. She found them huddled together in the garret of an obscure lodging-house in London, dreading to be separated, yet fearful that the incensed landlady might turn them into the street. They never forgot the day when they were clasped to her tender heart, and wept over with a mother's fondness. Since then they had been shielded from the ills of life—nay, more, had enjoyed all the advantages which a moderate income, unsparingly devoted to their welfare, could supply.

Their mother's sister had taken, in every sense, the mother's burden upon her. The rare intelligence of the two girls had been carefully developed, and the boy's studies brought to an issue which, with some well-husbanded family interest, procured him a commission in the army. Nor time, nor personal exertion, nor money were spared by Aunt Angela; she lavished all with the uncalculating tenderness of a heart which, even vicariously, rejoiced to find its true maternal vocation.

"It would be a sin to leave such rich soil untilled," she would say when remonstrated with for incurring fresh expense. "After all it is just what poor Elinor would have done for me. Dear suffering saint that she always was! And, my dears, I am a prudent old woman; the investment is a good one. See what *grandes dames* you will be one of these days. You shall take me out in your carriages: and Alister is going to be a General. He must pass the next examination, though."

Aunt Angela's forecast was curiously accurate. The

nieces, handsome in different styles, talented, and withal gifted with a natural air of distinction, the only inheritance of value which they derived from their estimable father, "made brilliant marriages," as the society phrase runs. The protectress of their youth enjoyed the genuine satisfaction of seeing her adopted daughters ornament homes worthy of them. Each was happy in the choice of a husband unexceptionable as to character, sufficiently endowed with wealth, and embellished by culture.

She should have rested upon her laurels. But her heart was too expansive for mere self-satisfying enjoyment, however well earned. Some natures crave full employ in the ceaseless war against evil. If denied scope, they organise crusades.

Such was the nature of Aunt Angela's preference for the south of France, no less sacred summons would have lured her from the shores of her beloved England. A new candidate for her faculty of self-sacrifice had arisen.

Harley Mortimer, an amiable *militaire* of no great strength of mind, had been a favourite intimate, even a dear friend, of hers in old days. People darkly hinted at an engagement. If so, it had been broken or evaded. The true story was never known. Captain Mortimer had suddenly made the most imprudent of marriages—had paid, as men are apt to do, for reckless self-indulgence and bad faith with a life's misery.

A passionate frivolous woman, the spoiled child of beauty and flattery, ignorant of self-restraint as an Italian peasant or a Russian duchess, she had tempted him to the irrevocable step. How dearly did he purchase the gratification of his fancy! She laid waste every green thing—every floweret in the garden of his life—alternately idolised and neglected her children, defied her husband, and completed the desolation of his house by an elopement. She in turn was deserted; for years her abode had been unknown, though her position was surmised.

Left with a family of untrained girls and boys on his hands, never particularly strong in mind and body, Captain Mortimer had taken his calamity "to heart," as the phrase runs, to such an extent that a dangerous

and wasting illness supervened. Poverty, mainly resulting from his wife's reckless extravagance, complicated the position.

This tale of woe happening to reach Aunt Angela's ears, she had promptly broken up her own small establishment in one of the loveliest parts of the fairest county in England, and alighted, a ministering angel, before the ill-starred home and its most forlorn inmates. Order, peace, plenty, and security, seemed to follow in her footsteps. Before many days had elapsed the sick man sufficiently recovered to take his place in a house which he hardly recognised, and among children who were improved out of all knowledge.

He felt moved to fall at the feet of his old love and to worship her for her goodness; but her calm, grave, stately kindness repressed him. Henceforth, however, the melancholy, brooding, half-despairing man, saw his home beautified and his children led with firm, yet kindly, hand into the right path, and no day rose without her name, hers who had wrought this magical change, being mingled with his prayers.

And now she, who had succoured so many, lay a-dying, struck down by one of those mysterious visitations of disease which spare the reckless scoffer, the notorious evil liver, only to alight upon the patient enthusiast, the bearer of help to weary overladen souls. After nursing the family to recovery with ceaseless night watchings and untiring tenderness, the healer had caught the infection and was past healing. The nurse herself required tending, the dryer of tears now required to be wept over and sorrowed for, passionately, despairingly.

Marguerite Gordon felt the tears in her own eyes as she pictured to herself the desolate group—the weeping children, the anguished parent, standing around the dying woman's bed. Aunt Angela had given her life in seeking to save that which was lost. Now she herself, at the bidding of a perhaps overstrained theory, was about to imperil, perhaps to lose, a life so dear to others, so vitally necessary, in a sense, to the children of her love, to the husband of her choice.

Confronting these disquieting thoughts, brave and

high-souled as was this woman, she could not but be moved. Yet she braced herself to the effort and steeled her heart, beating as was its every pulse almost to bursting.

The coast was reached. She had crossed the narrow sea, and once more the train was speeding fast across the sandy region which lies between Calais and the French metropolis before she had completely recovered her ordinary self-possession.

Paris was reached in the gray of a bitter winter morning, a winter severe almost beyond the memory of man.

Then the Marseilles line, nearing Lyons, the long train trembled as it swung at terrific speed around the curves of the best constructed, most liberally worked of all French railways.

The long, cold, melancholy day had passed. The night was already far advanced. Passengers had left and entered when Marguerite keenly scrutinised the appearance and manner of the only passenger—a female —who travelled in the same carriage.

The face was remarkable. One of those which haunt the gazer's brain, long after the form has disappeared from sight—long after the tones of the voice have ceased to echo in the ears. There are such fatal forms—lures —all resistless for evil.

For what purpose they are sent we know not. But their power over the souls of men has been chronicled since history's dawn.

A woman scarce older than herself, with the same shade of hair and colour of the eyes; a tall, slight, graceful woman; but so deeply had despair and misery graven their lines upon her brow that much of the original beauty had departed. The line of feature was not dissimilar, and through the whole *personnel* ran the strange suggestion of a likeness to Marguerite Gordon, sufficiently distinct to be visible to the duplicate herself.

"I wonder—ah! could anything have made me look as unhappy as that woman," she said to herself dreamily. "How little we know, either, to what other conditions may have shaped us. What has so altered, nay, ruined

that face, quenched the light of the eye, and traced the lines of endless sorrow around the corners of her mouth?"

Some slight change of posture caused the unknown woman to look up, and their eyes met. For one moment a look of haughty resentment, as of habitual use and wont, flitted over her features—then a look of ashen despair, hopeless gloom, succeeded—sweeping away before it all trace of slighter emotion as the mountain storm obliterates the summer shower, the passing cloud.

When Marguerite's regard next fell upon the stranger, to whom she seemed attracted by some resistless fascination, tears were stealing between the slender fingers with which she had covered her face.

Still interested, Marguerite observed that, considering the severe weather which had now been experienced for several weeks, she was poorly and insufficiently clad. Her garments were of the best quality, and most fashionable make, without rent or fray, but worn and threadbare to a degree that only a woman's eye could adequately discern.

Gradually the unfailing tact and true sympathetic charity which formed so large a proportion of Marguerite Gordon's nature won the confidence of the strange wayfarer. Step by step she elicited the fact that, like herself, she was bound on an errand connected with sickness and death to one passionately dear to that world wearied heart. More she would not own; but enough was said, though no full avowal was made, to show that the stranger had formerly moved in a very different rank and widely altered circumstances from those in which she now found herself. "My punishment, like the first murderer's," she said, "is greater than I can bear; but had it been a hundredfold more intensified—will it be so, I wonder, and for ages untold, as the priests tell us?" she suddenly cried—"I should deserve it all. Why should I tell so much to you—to a perfect stranger?" she said. "How they would have laughed once at the idea of haughty Helen making confidences with any one; but something draws me to you, as one ever noble and true, above the meannesses of life."

Here she again bowed her face on her hands and sobbed convulsively, while as the train rushed with unslackened speed through the ebon night, the storm-voices ever and anon made their wailings audible through the roll and clatter of the onward flying train.

The situation was strange and embarrassing. It was long past midnight; the cold was intense. A glance through the closed window only displayed an ocean of darkness, through which the red tongues of the lightning glittered at short intervals; while the heavy driving sleet crashed upon the panes.

"Great Heavens!" suddenly said Marguerite to herself; "she is dying of cold," as she marked the deep convulsive shudder which from time to time pervaded the stranger's whole frame; and, without a moment's hesitation, she took the sealskin cloak which lay at her side, and, partly by signs and partly by urgent entreaty, prevailed upon the half-frozen stranger to indue it.

She resisted strenuously at first; but, after a while, kindness and the sore need of warmth from which she had been suffering for hours prevailed.

"You are too kind; too good indeed, if you knew but all. I have been living in a corner of the south of France—ah me! where few English come. What a joy unspeakable it is to meet a compatriot, and such a one."

"I feel ashamed that I have not offered one of my wraps before," said Marguerite. "My poor husband insisted upon loading me with every conceivable thing in the shape of warm coverings. He said the weather was awful, and no one could tell how much they might require."

"Your husband? You are married then?" said the unknown. "And you love him, doubtless; and he loves you?"

"Indeed we do. Do I love him?—ah, how much!"

"And he loves you? You are sure of that?" queried the stranger, with curious eagerness.

"No man could love a woman more," she answered, half wondering why she should have been drawn into an avowal so unusual with her. "Why," she said

smiling, "I could hardly persuade him to let me leave home on this journey."

"He was right, you were wrong. All lonely journeying bears risks. Is happiness so common that we should tempt the very forces of nature to overthrow it? You have a child?"

"I have the dearest children that ever gladdened a mother's heart. Oh, my Rita, my Alister! my precious babes, how long will be the days till I see you again!"

"My God! My God!" cried the unknown, while her features worked, her every limb quivered as if in mortal agony. "My sin was great before Heaven, but my punishment is greater." Sighs such as may issue from the form wherein dwells a lost spirit told of endless despair; tears rolled down the wasted cheeks, while sobs and choking gasps shook her whole frame as she bowed her head on her breast and rocked herself to and fro in uncontrollable grief.

"Can I do nothing for you? Is your sorrow beyond human aid or counsel?" asked Marguerite, with the warm womanly sympathy which underlay her clear and generally accurate mental vision. Ordinarily she would have held aloof from an acquaintance whose whole *entourage* betokened doubtful, if not compromising, antecedents. But on this occasion caution was overborne by higher instincts, and only the deep charity of womanhood awoke, ready for any deed of mercy for the sake of a fallen sister.

She took the cold hands which lay so nerveless into her own. She strove by all gentle and womanly means to arouse a feeling of confidence in the bosom of the unknown. All her efforts seemed vain. But at length the paroxysm came to an end. The heaving bosom was stilled, the bowed head was raised, the tear-dimmed eyes opened, and a faint glimmer of their former brilliancy returned. Then she spoke.

"I ought to have been able to preserve the mask which time and sorrow have made well nigh inscrutable. But your kindness has softened me—has done that which desertion, neglect and poverty, doubly deserved as they are, had not power to do. When you spoke of your husband and children I thought my heart would have

broken. Once I had a loving husband—too fond alas! to guard the heedless woman who should have so dearly prized her own honour and his happiness. Once I had children, fair as the morn, loving cherubs to the guilty woman whom now they know not by name. Then came the tempter, the fiend from hell. Well do I know now, too late, every demon's wile of his dark soul. The frivolous, inexperienced woman, living but for dress and excitement, vain of her beauty, and thirsting for flattery, was changed by his arts and her own folly into a guilty wretch, whose doom was swiftly to befall. Now, can you hold your hand in mine?"

"God's mercy is infinite," said the sweet, full tones of Marguerite. "You have sinned but you have suffered and repented or you could not speak as you do now. Let us pray together: it will lighten your heart; it is the only solace on earth for the weary and heavy laden."

"Before you kneel with me, angel of mercy that you are," said the strange companion, "you shall know who it is that you have succoured, in the hour of her need, and, it may be, raised up from death unto life. I was called in the world Helen Delacour."

Here she named a name as familiar as a star in the firmament of fashion some years earlier; whose name had been in all men's mouths, and whose sudden fall from the heaven of fair fame had created the sensation of the day.

And was this careworn, desolate woman, the living presentment or the ghost of the once brilliant and beautiful Lady Delacour!

"But for the wise counsel and careful training of her, whose sick couch I am on my way to watch," she thought to herself, "this woman's fate might have been mine," and as the half painful idea passed through her brain, a thrill of gratitude gave light to the darksome winter journey, and more than ever confirmed the pious resolution which had actuated her in undertaking it.

"Let us kneel before that Great Being," she said, pressing with renewed tenderness the trembling hand, and drawing towards her the wasted form. "We are His children, and the work of His hand. He knows our frailty, and how thin a partition separates those

who are condemned and those who are honoured by the world. My sister, let us pray!"

Still rolled the long train through the dread unknown darkness of the gloomy winter night. The weird blaze of the great lamps shone through, but did not irradiate, the Cimmerian darkness. The wild wind howled and raved amid the intervals of the sleet storm, which ever and anon drove down upon the flying train.

The half-frozen guard and engineer peer through the mist wrack, vainly endeavouring to distinguish such signals as might be reasonably looked for. Suddenly the red danger lamp glimmers from out the immediate darkness. It is too late! The brakes are hard down; but the impetus is too great. For one moment the muffled sound of another train immediately ahead is heard. The kneeling women rise to their feet, each with a look of calm trust in a superior power in their faces. Then, with a sudden roar, the grinding, crushing sound of a falling avalanche comes the collision; swift, sudden, overwhelming, filling as with a lightning flash each sense with unendurable pain, terror, despair. An agonising moment—a weird "geist'chor" of screams and groans—then darkness, oblivion!

. . . . . .

"Paris and Marseilles line.—Frightful collision near the Paris-Lyons terminus!—One hundred passengers killed; an equal number wounded.—Official investigation demanded."

These were the announcements, in leaded capitals, which met the eye in all the leading papers for a week after the occurrence, with daily additions of such freshly-gathered *morceaux* of realistic horror as the adventurous keen-eared specials could pick up.

Within twenty hours the death-list—a long one, alas!—was published, first in the Continental, then in all the leading English journals. Their names and addresses were given as soon as they could be identified with the information gathered from hotel registers and the like sources.

Many of the corpses were frightfully mutilated; disfigured beyond all recognition, even by the friends and relatives who came pouring in by the first trains, eager

to gaze even upon the sad relics of the loved and lost—to mourn over the wreck of youth and loveliness—to hang despairingly over the spot where the beings that had lent every charm to life lay cold and still for evermore.

Among these stony-eyed, sad-faced pilgrims, in whose changed countenance no light of human interest shone was Hugh Gordon. He had been permitted to view for one sad hour at least the shattered form—the dread death likeness of her who had but so lately lain on his breast, whose heart had throbbed with the warmth of purest wedded love for him, and him only.

A cloth covered the disfigured face—the crushed and mangled form. This he but once removed, to replace with soul-curdling horror. A long dark lock escaped from the cap which confined the once abundant tresses. This he shore gently from the head, then kissed the pale cold brow, and placed the relic upon his heart. The officers of the department had been assisted in their identification of the wife of the rich English milord by the name and address of the dead woman on a strip of linen sewn inside of the valuable sealskin mantle which she had worn at the time of the accident. Yes! how well he remembered marking the letters to form "Marguerite Gordon," and now the ink was still fresh, the gloss upon the costly garment as yet undimmed; and yet she who had been associated with every moment of every day of his life since the happy marriage time was a mutilated corpse, hasting to decay, only meet to be buried out of his, out of all men's sight.

It was too sudden, too horrible to be true. He wept, he moaned, he raved, he tore his hair, he blasphemed. He arraigned even the goodness of the Almighty Being by whom such horrors were permitted.

CHAPTER II

BESIDES those who, like Marguerite Gordon, had some token or garment by which they were recognisable, there was a ghastly heap of unclaimed humanity, truncated and dismembered portions, which the authorities had mercifully caused to be committed, all speedily and indivisibly, to the earth. With reasonable correctness a record was compiled from the names and addresses furnished in various ways and from unexpected quarters. Those known to be alive were subtracted from the sum total, and also those identified after death. The remainder was held to consist of those collectively interred, "in one red burial blent." The neighbouring hospital of Montpellier was crowded with patients, of whom some progressed favourably, while others were borne forth daily to the now well-filled cemetery.

As the days rolled on, the mourning crowd commenced to scatter and return whence they came, bearing their friends with them, or leaving their dead in a strange land. The nine days' wonder commenced, with the world's inevitable progress to abate; and, last of all, hoping against hope—reluctant, yet despairing—with scarce sufficient energy to go through the necessary forms, Hugh Gordon retraced his steps, and sought his desolate home in England.

How dreary seemed the well-known house to which he had never before returned without feelings of joy too deep for words. The sight of his orphaned children racked afresh his tortured heart as he recalled the well-known tones of that voice now hushed for ever. It had ever sounded in his ears as that of an angel, breathing purest love and well-nigh divine tenderness as she recounted the infantile pleasantries of their cherished darlings.

"My God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" groaned out the unhappy man, as the children rushed to meet him, calling out in words that pierced his heart,

"Papa, Papa! oh, how glad we are to see you back. Where is mamma, darling mamma? Is she coming

presently? Why did you leave her behind? Has she brought us the French toys she told us about?"

"Take them indoors, Forrester, for God's sake!" he said to the nurse, a staid middle-aged woman who now appeared, while the children stared, astonished and dismayed at the change in his manner. "Tell them their mother will never come back. Why did I not accompany her, as I once intended, and die with her? God be merciful to me, a sinner! I wonder if I shall go mad!"

He put up his hands as if to cool his burning brow, and passed into the house, as might a man who enters a mausoleum where all of his race has been entombed, conscious he shall soon rejoin them. Can mortal essay to describe the palpable darkness—the intense gloom of the desolation which fell upon Hugh Gordon as daily, hourly he realised yet more vividly the fact that his soul's idol—his life's solace—his heart's best treasure had passed away from him—from earth—from all things under the sun—for ever?

It had been hard and bitter for him to reconcile himself to the short absence which her journey had apparently needed, so genuine and disquieting had been his unrest, that had he possessed a stronger will—that most obstinate form of selfishness, which men dignify with the name of firmness—he would have forbidden her to leave him. What was her aunt? What was any friend or relative on earth to her own welfare—to his claim as husband and father? Marguerite was the best wife, the most lovable woman in the whole world, but she had just a spice of obstinacy in her, it must be confessed. He should not have given way to her. He should have controlled her in this thing. And now because of his irresolution and her persistency had this dread, irrevocable disaster occurred. This peerless woman—this inestimable wife and mother had fallen a sacrifice to a wretched casualty. Her children were motherless, he himself a forlorn wretch—the most miserable outcast, the most hopeless pariah that crawled upon the earth. The sun of his happiness had set in endless gloom. He loathed the light of day. Why should he not walk to meet an advancing train, and end the life which had

become so burdensome under the wheels of the Juggernaut that had crushed the flower of his existence? He could almost have welcomed its ruthless wheels in his present mood of black, rayless despair. Hugh Gordon was not one of those men who, though grieving sincerely and deeply under such a bereavement, can wear a calm outward appearance—who can seek in the details of business or of an engrossing occupation

"Surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore."

In the days of their wedded life, the absorbing passion with which he had wooed and won his wife had never ebbed. It had but flowed onward with a full-fed steady course. With him there had been no comparative admiration of fresher beauties—no appreciation of the multiform and varied graces of womanhood in the abstract.

For him—save for purposes of utility and necessary companionship of other men—the remainder of the sex need not have existed. Her intelligence, her culture, her stately beauty, her loving nature, her true heart, had originally enthralled him. The deeper and fuller knowledge he had been privileged to gain of these attributes had but produced in him a more unbounded, reverent admiration—a more sacred, unquestioning, unfaltering love.

They had never been separated for a day before the ill-fated journey which he had always so mistrusted; and now she was gone, gone for evermore! Her mangled body, deprived even of peaceful and befitting dissolution, lay in a foreign land, among aliens in blood and faith. But one short week had elapsed since they stood together on the platform of the railway terminus, when she waved her handkerchief and smiled that sweet and gracious smile that was so graven on his memory, on his heart. And now——

The wretched man cast himself down upon the floor of his chamber and groaned aloud in the unendurable agony of his spirit. But for his children, the darlings whom she had so loved, who were now left as a trust to him, whose infant prattlings and childish tasks her pure spirit would o'erlook from heaven, he would flee

from this desert earth, this hateful wilderness, from which the Queen of Faerye had departed, leaving but drear solitude and loathly fens where beauty and verdure were wont to smile.

The sad hours, the melancholy days wore on. Time brought no solace to the grief of the desolate man, to his sorrow. At times extreme debility appeared likely to make an end of the disaster, and of his enfeebled frame altogether. Then his constitution would rally, and a period of comparative health follow. As yet none had ever seen a smile upon his face. He went about his duties, his pleasures mechanically. He was as a corpse reanimated. The sole matter which had power to interest him was the education of his children. In them he saw the darlings upon whom the "dear dead woman" had lavished the ceaseless care, the overflowing tenderness of an unselfish motherly heart; to whom her first waking care, her last sleeping thoughts were dedicated; whom as a Christian she was pledged not to worship, but whom, as a woman and a mother, she nevertheless did adore with an idolatry that reason and the words of Holy Writ had scarce power to disturb.

He had at first connected the unconscious little ones with the terrible disaster—the dread storm, in which his life's barque had made final wreck. Then he began to tolerate, afterwards to love them, daily exhibiting as they did the traits of character of both parents after a wonderful fashion.

In the boy's proud face the soft dark eyes of his mother looked over from time to time at the silent, lonely man with a pleading gaze, which made him fain to quit the house and seek for distraction in the hardest outward exercise. His own mother's features, with the smile of a dead sister, appeared before him in the countenances of the two girls, and gradually drew him to be almost jealously watchful of this small fold in the wilderness. Yet the desolation of his home had by no means abated. This sorrow had settled down in the heart of the solitary mourner like the shadow of a funeral pall. It was a gloom which invested his every waking thought, every act of his daily life. The ceaseless misery commenced to grow into a nameless

terror which at times agonised him with a haunting doubt lest his reason might in time be impaired—might even then be disordered.

He was not one who could turn from a great sorrow to find solace in the ephemeral distractions which serve well so many men in their dark hour. The fair face of heaven itself was gloomed—o'erclouded as by the horror of a great tempest—the awful silence—the impending destruction of a coming earthquake.

The tempest had swept by; the forest had been levelled; the earth had opened, and into its riven depths the fair columns, the graceful friezes and entablature of the edifice which sheltered and graced his life had disappeared.

How could he be consoled? Could the earth give up her dead—the sea his lost argosy? It was mockery to talk—madness to reflect. Why should he cumber the earth? Better death and oblivion a hundredfold than this hourly rack and scourge—this daily, nightly torture.

Whenever he looked upon his children, to whom his whole heart went out in passionate tenderness unusual in a man, how every fibre of his heart seemed freshly torn! How every nerve of his being was newly lacerated as he thought of her, whose wise and sleepless love wrapped them as in a garment close sheltering in its prevision and completeness from every ill of life. Did not their every word, almost every act, remind him of the loved, the lost, the dead, until his whole being cried aloud in unendurable agony!

Perhaps a more healthy form of pain, now that "he had come to live on poisons," was experienced by him when he discovered that for want of due care and nurture his darling children were deteriorating markedly. In vain he changed their nurses, their teachers; in vain he remained within the lonely house so full of dreadful memories, in order to watch the education of his loved ones. It seemed not to avail.

Whether his continuous melancholy repelled them, or, quick to perceive altered circumstances, as children are, they assumed positions of independence from which it seemed impossible to dislodge them. When he interfered he seemed to make matters worse by imprudent

rewards or punishment. He even fancied that he detected a taint of insincerity either fostered or winked at by their attendants, which more than all things else reduced him to despair.

At this state of affairs, when it appeared to him as if the virtual loss of his children was about to be superadded to his already overwhelming burdens, a letter arrived from a cousin of his wife's who had more than once resided in the house as a visitor in the days of love and life and glory which were now so far, so dimly distant.

After mechanically running his eyes over the paper, he began to collect his scattered thoughts.

Yes, he remembered her well. She was a fair girl with a low voice and happy eyes. There was a kind of likeness to—her!—Ah, God!—to her! And yet they used to laugh. Yes, laugh. Did we laugh then? Was that the word? And say when she was older she would still more resemble her. She was always good and kind to the children. They loved her, and she seemed never happier than when telling them fairy tales, and generally sacrificing herself to them. Marguerite used to say that she should be head mistress of a child's college and that the students should be sent when they were three years old, so that at ten they could graduate in gentleness, unselfishness, and general readiness to receive instruction.

For the rest, she had been like all the remainder of the feminine creation to him, one of the world of creatures whom he viewed with benevolent toleration, but in whose personal traits and attributes he found only the faintest interest. He could but recall a blurred and sketchy outline of her general appearance and presentment. This was her letter which at length he succeeded in deciphering:

"ST. OUEN, *April 10th.*

"MY DEAR COUSIN HUGH,—Mother and I wrote you at the time of your great sorrow, but doubtless you were, as was natural, unable to answer letters of the kind. Though we could not have you think that we could pass over dear, dear Marguerite's dreadful end without assuring you of our heartfelt, fullest sympathy.

"Mother, I think, wrote since we have been abroad, but we also have had our deep and bitter grief, though not in all respects to be compared with yours.

"You may remember that we had to go abroad on account of the health of my beloved brother, whose illness commenced at college when he was reading hard for an examination, and rendered it necessary for him to seek a warmer climate. More than a year has passed since then, and he, though at first apparently recovering, gradually declined, and a few weeks ago passed peacefully away here.

"My dear mother's state of grief was such that we could not think of moving homeward until it had abated. She has now consented to return to England, and has authorised me—recognising her duty towards you and yours—to say that if you do not object to our presence in your house, and think that we could be of any aid or comfort we could pay you a visit of a few weeks before we go back to Stanmore, the sight of which, destined as it was for poor Cyril's future home, she cannot as yet support.

"She bids me say that this offer should have been made before, had not God willed it otherwise.

"Believe me, dear Cousin Hugh,

"Yours affectionately,

"MARIANA WINSTANLEY."

After reading this letter over and over again, as if unable finally to master the contents, Hugh Gordon paced for an hour to and fro in the large room in which he usually sat after the children had been dismissed for the night. He remembered after considerable effort, first, the letter of condolence sent by the widow and her daughter, which had even then fallen softly as a message of loving sympathy on his bruised heart. He had thrown it aside with the piles of half-read or wholly unopened letters to none of which he could recur without a revival of torment. The girl's letter he remembered too, simply worded as it was. She, too, had loved the dead.

And could he bear to have a living reminder of all "the old sweet tenderness," of the days when she had

shared their happy home? How considerate had they been in that they had concealed at the time their own great sorrow and been thoughtful only for his.

And now their days of despair and mourning and woe had arrived. They were even as he—weeping and refusing to be comforted. It was a house of mourning, and in its halls such dark-robed, dark-souled guests would be fitting and appropriate.

They should come and be welcome, as was befitting. They would be the first strangers, though many had offered to cheer the sorrowing recluse, that its portals would open to receive.

So Hugh Gordon wrote saying that "if it suited them to abide for a while in a household where still unending sorrow reigned supreme, that they were truly welcome. He was a wretched broken creature, incapable of hope or comfort. Their sorrow should be his, and as their wretchedness could not be increased, it was possible that some ray of consolation might be permitted by Heaven to enter, where the souls of all dwelt in such utter darkness—and—thanking them—from his heart—he remained—their most miserable kinsman, HUGH GORDON."

CHAPTER III

WHEN this letter had been dispatched and he had given the necessary orders to make the requisite arrangements for the reception of the guests, he felt an unwonted elevation of spirits, caused perhaps by the evident joy and satisfaction of the children, orally communicated, upon the announcement of the visit.

"Cousin Mariana coming again!" said the eldest, Rita. "Oh! I am so glad! She was so kind to us when she was here before. I never saw any one like her. Did you, Alister?"

"She knew more stories than any girl in the world," said the boy, "and she wasn't like a girl either. She could play cricket and rounders, and she showed me how to make a kite."

"And when mother had a headache she kept us all quiet a whole afternoon. Nobody else could do that."

"I should think not! She wouldn't try it now, I suppose," said Alister defiantly. "And yet," he added with a softened tone, "I wouldn't like to vex her. Except mother, I never knew any one else it hurt you to be cross with."

"It will be almost like mother coming back," said Rita; and then, the tears rushing to her eyes, she sobbed out, "Oh, mother! mother! if you only could!"

"She's a good girl!" said Alister, roughly. "I didn't think there could be such a girl. But you shouldn't talk as if any one could be like mother."

For the first few weeks after the advent of Mrs. Winstanley and her daughter, the ordinary course of Hugh Gordon's life was but little changed. Satisfied that his children were safely and wisely tended, he returned to his bachelor habits. He dined regularly at his club, and only returned to his own house to retire for the night. Indeed, feeling assured of his house and children being utterly secure, he began to indulge himself in short absences. He yielded still more to a morbid dislike of his home, and the too familiar appendages, which still had power to revive all old regrets. The presence of Mariana and her mother bade fair to constitute him a permanent exile from the fated household, of which they had fondly hoped to revive the charm.

But little heed was taken by the two women who had become domiciled in so drear a dwelling. Mrs. Winstanley was apparently still absorbed in her own grief, noticing externals rarely. She confined herself chiefly to the regulation of household matters. As for Mariana, she became devoted to the tuition of the children with an enthusiasm natural to her age, though perhaps rare as to the direction it had taken. Their progress repaid her toil abundantly, and with the ex-

ception of an occasional remark to her mother, as to the continued absence of their host and relative, her own studies, and those of her self-appointed charge, almost completely engrossed her waking hours.

So passed the autumn. The spring, an exceptionally mild one, fair in promise, bud, and blossom, had, through the first wood-notes wild of the feathered heralds, proclaimed its approach. The long-denuded earth resumed its vernal carpet. Tokens of the changing year were rife; and as, with the mysterious power of the season, a subtle influence pervades alike all animated and vegetable being, so the dead heart and dulled senses of Hugh Gordon commenced to stir and arouse themselves.

For days he had been restless and uneasy. He had prepared his guests for an absence of greater duration. He indeed contemplated a not wholly purposeless ramble through Palestine, finishing up with a winter among the Druses of the Lebanon, and an exhaustive study of city life in Damascus. He thought indistinctly of India, with Cashmere for the finale.

"And how long shall you be away, Hugh?" asked Mrs. Winstanley.

"Perhaps a year or eighteen months," he answered languidly; "but really it does not matter much so long as you and our dear Mariana are good enough to take the burden of housekeeping off my hands."

"And shall you be as long as that?" asked Mariana.

"Why not?" he returned. "If you knew how tired I am of life, which is one long regret—without a hope—a wish—hardly a tie to existence."

The girl did not speak, but she raised her eyes with a half reproachful look as she pointed to the children, one of whom—wise with the sad wisdom of the motherless—evidently comprehended the meaning of the dialogue.

"Are you going to leave us, father?" Rita said. "Oh, I am so sorry; just when we are getting on so nicely with our lessons and feeling almost happy again."

"True, true!" said the unhappy man. "And I am become selfish and forgetful of the duty she performed so nobly, and would have bequeathed to me, had an hour's space been allowed her?"

"It's so dull too when you're away, papa," pleaded the little girl. "Cousin Mariana plays with us, or I don't know what we should do. Aunt said one day it must be very dull for her, poor cousin! and I think it must be," continued the child gravely. "She does nothing but teach us and read and sit by herself doing fancy work."

"Hush, my dears," said Mariana, blushing and surprised for a moment from her usual composure. "I am very well employed, and very happy; am I not, mother?"

"Happy, who is happy? What a word to use in this world of sorrow," said the widow. "But you are certainly not unhappy, though I know no girl of your age that would endure the same sort of life. But now I think of it, Hugh, we must not help you to desert these dear children wholly. How like Rita grows to her dear mother. Something might happen, you know."

"She does indeed resemble my lost darling," he answered. "I feel it and it tears open the half-closed wound. But I recognise my position. I will not supinely delegate all its duties to those who are kind enough to relieve me of so large a share. Still I must leave England for a while. It is at present insupportable."

"And for how long are you going to desert your home and friends?"

"I think I may use the old formula—for a year and a day," he answered, with softened intonation and a searching glance at the fair girl's features, now half hidden by the closely pressed faces of the children lovingly embracing her.

"I think we may allow you so much," said Mrs. Winstanley, "but beware how you extend it."

"And I shall find you here on my return," he said, "just as you are now?"

"Just as we are now," said Mariana shyly; "take care that you return equally safe."

But little more was said. The arrangements for a solitary traveller of ample means were soon made. The next evening saw Hugh Gordon in Paris, whence he purposed reaching the scene of the ever-memorable

disaster, and revisiting the tomb where lay the body of Marguerite—where lay the heart, as he daily, hourly told himself, of Hugh Gordon.

. . . . . .

The little cemetery, unlike some of our English enclosures, was truly cared for and neatly kept. The day was deliciously soft and fair; early violets and primroses bloomed on the fresh turf of the grave for which the rich English milord had paid so liberally to be tended the year through. How could it be that Nature should smile—so falsely fair, flouting the winter of his soul with this phantasmal glamour of unreal happiness.

As he lay on the thickly enamelled turf above the spot where rested that faithful heart of which every pulsation had moved but for him and the children of their love, he revolved again the events of the dread day when, half maddened, half stunned by the terrible suddenness of the blow, he had hurried to gaze on the crushed, and (as he groaned out in his agony) dishonoured remnant of his beloved Marguerite. Could this distorted brow, with shapeless features, be hers? Could this mangled torso be her goddess-moulded form? Alas! the evidence was but too complete. The soft, dark hair, of which he had borne away the matted blood-stained tresses, the crushed bosom still wrapped in the costly sealskin garment—how little had he deemed it was fated to be a portion of her shroud!

And was this the end of all their love? A passion so pure, so rich, so tender, which both had fondly deemed would outlast youth, and would illumine age;—would cast into shade all earthly joys, would waft their indissoluble being o'er life's tide to that larger existence which is beyond the grave.

Was this eternal justice? What had they done to deserve this awful execution of the purer being!—this hardly less awful condemnation to solitary sorrow of the survivor?

And yet the birds sang, the flowers bloomed, the heavens glowed brightly blue beneath the sun of the south, the streamlet danced and murmured to the whispering breeze.

"Why should I live?" Hugh Gordon asked himself. "Is not the taste of all earthly food, all pleasant things which were wont to be so sweet of savour, when glorified by her companionship, but Dead Sea apples, full of dust and bitterness?

"Why should I remain in a world which has been robbed of every charm, of her glorious beauty, her pure spirit, her steadfast faith? All gone, lost, decaying amid the charnel-house memories of the past! What have I to live for? My children? It may be to rear painfully fresh victims for a sacrifice as unsparing as unmerited."

Hours passed on as he lay prone and as if lifeless, his limbs and muscles nerveless, while images of dread and despair floated ceaselessly through his distempered brain.

The sun had long set, the twilight had passed, the stars had commenced to glimmer, the birds which revel in the bright hues of day were hushed, as he raised himself to a sitting posture and looked gloomily on the starlit heavens. How often had they gazed on the great company of stellar fires, hand clasped in hand! How often had they on such an eve, solemn and inspiring as this, exchanged the elevated thoughts to which such a scene gives rise in cultured minds! And now, where was she? In what heaven was the star of his spirit's light, now reft from earth and floating in spheres undreamed of—formless, perchance mingled with the white-robed angelic band, or unresting, if not suffering in vestibules devoted to the purification of the soul from faintest earthly taint?

The bright star which they knew so well, even in the flush of their newly-confessed love, seemed to sparkle and coruscate. Hugh Gordon stretched out his arms as if to enfold her earthly form.

"Oh, love! love! love!" he cried wildly, "if thy pure spirit be sentiment within the bounds of mortal ken, give me but a token—a sign, even the faintest—that I may take courage to bear the burden, to perform the duties of life, ere the waters of despair close over my soul!" But none answered.

No white-robed form fleeted across the line of vision. No tender whisper broke the hallowed silence. Lone

—hushed—sacred to desolation and to death seemed all things—when suddenly from a neighbouring flower-thicket, the growth around a long-forgotten grave, burst forth that wondrous nature-poem, the song of the nightingale.

To his over-wrought mind, even this trifling accident assumed the guise of a revelation. Together, they had read Heine's weird and wondrous verse, more than once had watched the stars rise over Isola Bella, and listened to the haunting, magical love-notes. Her words, her tones, her clasp upon his arm, her breath upon his cheek, were brought back more vividly than in a dream by the half-forgotten melody. As the long trills of the immortal lament swelled through the silent air, a softened influence stole over him. The gloom passed from his face; the bitterness from his heart. He arose and stood firmly upon his feet, facing the east, where the lamps of the town were to be plainly seen.

"It is the language of love and hope," he said. "I will do as she would have counselled me. When were her words other than of strength and reason, purified by love? I will go forth henceforth as a man among men. I will remember that I am a parent, and will essay to behold her in the children of our love, when Time shall have played the physician."

On the morrow Hugh Gordon fared forth. Ere long he felt the fierce sun of Egypt upon his brow. He gazed upon vast columnar monuments in desert cities; he visited shrines raised by the most ancient of the earth's tribes at the birthplaces of art, of science, of religion. He rode with the wild children of the desert; he lived in their tents, and turned a bold brow and reckless breast to the Bedouin spear. He sailed on the broad bosom of the mystic Nile and gazed, standing by the tomb of "him who sleeps at Philæ," on the mouldering fanes of a dead faith, on the vast and voiceless relics of dimmest eld.

He sojourned with those fierce tribes that abhor the Crescent, he slept encircled by the bodyguard of a pasha, or journeyed with a solitary camel-driver over the terrible stage strewed with the bones of men and steeds, of whole caravans slain by the terrible simoom,

when to halt is to die, and to linger a more gradual death.

Amid strangest scenes, wildest adventures, and jarring tongues, none had been able to discover what the calm Englishman, with the sad eyes and melancholy brow, feared or loved.

More than one daughter of the desert would have essayed the last, for his rare smile was sweet, and his voice, save in the forefront of the fight, low and musical. But alike to him were the smile of woman or the frown of man. He regarded them not. And in time he came to be known among the simple Children of the Waste, or the more crafty dwellers in cities, as one upon whom Allah had set his seal, for great good or evil. So that he passed amid them unquestioned and unchallenged; invested gradually with the privileges of a santon.

Observing these things, and in a sense accepting the convenient reputation, Hugh Gordon utilised the remainder of his stay in Damascus, his last place of abode, to procure much rare, and indeed chiefly inaccessible information, which, owing to the well-known religious bigotry of the Moslem population of the city, had mostly been refused to ordinary travellers.

Dressing and living as an ordinary Mohammedan, he pursued his studies with a zeal which surprised himself, until the day drew near which would leave him but sufficient time to return to England. He then collected the material which he had acquired for the production of a work upon certain hitherto almost untried tracks of Eastern travel, and prepared for departure.

The production of this work had been a favourite idea, often discussed between himself and her whom he had lost. At first half involuntarily—latterly with a resolute and quickened purpose—he had braced himself to the performance of what he came to consider as a sacred duty, a pious offering to the spirit of the departed. He pleased himself with thinking that he was now working in precisely the mode and measure—the perils he had so recklessly dared excepted—that his darling would have counselled. She—how often he recalled—had ever impressed upon him the necessity of

using his undoubted talents, the gifts which he too often permitted to lie fallow, pleading as an excuse that no perfectly happy man (alas !) ever wrote or read industriously. How mockingly was he wont to upbraid her with an uneasy craving for distinction, and how would she rejoin, with a heaven of love and truth in those clear eyes, "that she wished to make all the world share in her wifely pride."

The happiness was gone—no more to return on earth. But could he be more loyal to her memory than by raising up this monument of the research and industry she had invoked, this mental fruition, complete, if late, of development, which should hand down her name to future ages.

CHAPTER IV

AGAIN in England! Once more Hugh Gordon found himself in the home of the peaceful virtues, the abode of all the refined luxury which the experience of the ages has capitalised. In despite of the world-weariness of his soul, his resolute denial of future good, of possible happiness, the wanderer could not but savour gratefully the fruits of a completed civilisation to which he had returned with a sensitised palate. Travel, toil, and abstinence, had done their work, had produced the revivifying effect which is rarely absent when the means have been truly employed. His very frame, his expression, his bearing had altered. Bronzed and athletic, stately in figure and dignified of mien, he was a different man from the bowed mourner, well-nigh prostrated under his crushing load of sorrow, who had urged himself, supine and indifferent, along the track of travel but a short year since. Rumours of his researches and achievements had preceded him, and he commenced to find himself famous as a traveller—an authority of weight on doubtful points of Eastern lore.

He had remained a day at his club before he could summon courage to repair to the home which in that long past day he always so promptly sought. When he reached the well-remembered door old memories assailed him, and he could hardly summon sufficient presence of mind to give his name to the wondering maid-servant.

He had hardly reached the morning room when a noise of eager footsteps resounded in the hall, and the door was thrown open to permit of the entrance of his girl and boy. Rita had grown comparatively tall and womanly. The likeness to her mother, pronounced as it had always been, was now almost startling. A groan well-nigh escaped him as he folded her and his son, a spirited blooming boy, in his arms. The moment was one of intense joy and thankfulness. After all, life had remnants of pleasure left. How healthful, how happy, how well cared for, how improved in all respects were his children! And who is this who comes behind them, less eager, doubtless, but with a look of unaffected pleasure and welcome in her face? It is Mariana. And to her he feels that he owes much of the repose of spirit that he has been able to enjoy in undisturbed travel. To her he owes the care, the watchfulness, which his loved ones have so amply demonstrated.

As he pours forth his gratitude with a warmth unusual to his natural character, she looks up with eyes half surprised, yet full of a shy gratitude which yet further increased his feeling of obligation. Her mother, she explained, was absent on a visit, but would return on the morrow. Meanwhile they were prepared for his arrival; she hoped he would find all things in order. The time had passed rapidly, though at first they had found it rather lonely. Did he not think the children grown? And was he now going to remain in England?

"Oh! you must not go away any more, papa!" said Rita, fixing her eyes upon him, with a glance so like her mother's that he could not but thrill at the remembrance. "You will not leave us again?"

"I am not going away, that I know of, darling, for a long while," said he, passing his fingers through her waving curls. "I have been in many far lands, and I begin to feel one's own home and one's own children must be thought of."

"I will go abroad and travel when I am a man," said the boy proudly. "I should like to see Arabs with spears, and fine horses and camels, but I should not wish to stay away so long. You won't go away just yet, will you, papa?"

"I think not," said the returned wayfarer, as his gaze took in the glowing fire, the loving eyes of the children, and the delicate, thoughtful face of the girl whose every feeling seemed centred in them.

And in truth, from that hour a different spirit appeared to animate the returned wanderer. He mingled more in society, and yielded himself gracefully to the curiosity which was felt in one who was said to have met with romantic adventures and to have discovered rare and precious antiques. His bronzed face and flowing beard, of which he could not be persuaded to divest himself even after his return to civilisation were voted interesting and uncommon; even his partially relinquished melancholy was accepted among the catalogue of his attractions as a touching tribute to a memory which, however, he might possibly be induced to forgo in time.

Had he possessed but the usual complement of vanity it must have been largely developed by the warmth of the social atmosphere which now encircled him. But that was one of the soft attributes of his youth which had perished beneath the storm which had broken on his devoted head. He passed through the halls of the rich and the titled careless of praise, wonder, or admiration, as amid the desert tents.

In one respect only, he exhibited a trace of resemblance to the ordinary life of those among whom he now moved. He addressed himself earnestly to the arrangement of his literary materials, devoting the greater portion of each day to the routine work necessary for publication. In the afternoons he commenced to charge himself with the exercise and

recreation of his children, and in company with their guardian and instructress, pleased himself in devising excursions which were mutually beneficial.

Insensibly this house, which had so long shared in the mourning which had shrouded the hearts of its inmates, commenced to wear a more cheerful appearance. He had fitted up one of the upper rooms as a study. Into this he caused to be moved his collections and literary treasures—here he worked during the morning; often, indeed, far into the night. But so increasingly attractive became the charm of the pleasant evening meeting; when the children talked with unchecked animation; when Mrs. Winstanley sat serenely occupied as before his departure, with some particular form of knitting likely to survive the fall of empires and the flight of time; when Mariana sang with girlish grace, at the fervent entreaty of the children, that he found effort necessary to enable him to quit the homelike group for the solitude of his study.

Gradually, too, the demands of society encroached upon his too careful avoidance of hospitality. Invitations, inclusive of Mariana and her mother, commenced to arrive, many of which, from old friends and relatives, could not be declined. Not seldom, too, he was anxious to entertain acquaintances whom he had encountered abroad or friends to whom he had been under obligation.

Little by little he found, as has many another voyager who would have elected to stand on the shore for ever mourning for the lost, that the returning wave of the world's tide was beyond his power to resist. Gradually he saw himself once more drawn into the vortex of social reciprocity, until at length he told himself that it was needless to stand aloof, easier to practise a soulless conformity than to struggle vainly, only to earn the reputation of morbid eccentricity.

During the first months succeeding his return to England he had conversed more with Mariana than at any previous period of his life. Anxious to hear about matters which had transpired during his absence, he had tested her faculty of description as well as her general information almost unconsciously, but still

fully and accurately. He was at times amazed at the closeness of her reasoning powers. In spite of himself he felt pleased and exhilarated; her cheerfulness of spirit, as well as the harmless humour which she occasionally displayed, became contagious. He found the girl whose intellectual grade he had disposed of in a kindly contemptuous way as sufficing merely for domestic duties, ripened into a woman of sense and energy. Her undistracted life had been favourable to studies from which she had reached a degree of mental culture rarely accessible to women.

With all this she seemed to be utterly free from desire to shine in society or to change her surroundings in any way. This was a matter for which Hugh Gordon was unable to find an adequate solution. "It is unnatural," he said to himself, "that so fair and bright a creature should devote herself so contentedly to the tuition of children, the care of her aged mother, and the society of a man whose spirit is darkened for evermore with the shadow of a great sorrow. How is it to be accounted for? I know that she loved *her*. That she said when I spoke of the children of her love so forlorn in their sudden bereavement, 'I will care for them,' and nobly has she fulfilled the promise. Still, I had hardly deemed such self-abnegation possible. Yet why should I question the purity, the loftiness of woman's soul, when I had in my lost darling so bright an exemplar?"

As the household approximated more nearly to those of ordinary London life, a new phase of sensation commenced to arise in the consciousness of its master. He found himself occasionally noting the fact that other people dwelt admiringly upon the bright face which lit up so winningly with the play of fancy or feeling, or listened with satisfaction to the mental power displayed so unconsciously. At such times the soul of Hugh Gordon was disquieted within him. When they returned to the house after entertainments at which such slight *contretemps* had occurred, he was often silent and reserved in spite of her efforts to rouse him.

He, himself, had no suspicion of the cause. Until one day, a friend of the family, congratulating him upon the satisfactory state of his daughter's education,

expressed her regret that all would be thrown back in case of Mariana leaving them.

"But why should she leave us?" he asked. "She appears perfectly happy."

"That is true," answered the lady. "But you cannot expect so attractive a girl to remain a mere teacher in your household all her life. She will be certain to marry some day."

"Marry!" asked Gordon, in tones of extreme astonishment. "Why should she marry?"

"Why should she not?" queried the matron in turn. "Indeed, people begin to talk and are saying that Charles Waterton is paying her marked attention."

"Pooh—a brainless puppy like that; absurd!"

"There is no absurdity about it. He is a handsome young fellow, though not so clever as she is, I grant. But if you don't wish her to be married and go away from you there is only one remedy."

"And what may that be?"

"Marry her yourself! Nay, my dear Hugh," the kind-hearted woman went on, placing her hand upon his arm, as she noticed his expression of pain. "Do not think that I show for one moment any disrespect or want of feeling for our lost Marguerite. But she is gone from earth. You are still a young, and, let me say, a handsome man. Why should you continue to lead a wretched, lonely existence?"

"My life is over. I can never love again."

"Not as of old, I grant, but we women are good at making allowances, and will forgive much in men we respect. You are hurt at the idea of losing the society of this girl, so invaluable to your children and your household. Now I say, as a woman of the world and your very good friend, that there is only one way of providing against the injury to your domestic life which is very likely to take place. You will be happier, more settled, more likely to see your children well brought up if you marry Mariana Winstanley; and this is a step which your wife, poor Marguerite herself, if she could now influence this life of ours below, would counsel you to take."

"Would you say as much in the case of your own husband if you died to-morrow?"

"Most certainly! when a decent interval had elapsed, as in your case: and if my successor were half as good as Mariana is, I would counsel my poor Henry to go and do likewise, for his own and the dear children's sake."

"Always supposing the young woman would have him."

"That can only be found out by asking her," said she. "And now, Hugh Gordon, you have a woman's true and honest advice—which men, for one cause or another, seldom get. The sooner you act upon it the better."

. . . . . .

Hugh Gordon went home troubled in mind—filled with thoughts to which he had long been a stranger—conscious that new and foreign elements were about to be introduced into the scheme of his future life. He was grievously unprepared. He looked at the question from all points of view; he thought of the sudden withdrawal of the atmosphere of home, which had of late become so necessary a part of his daily existence. Now that the element of insecurity had appeared, he commenced as others have done, to rate at its true value the jewel he was perhaps about to lose. He carefully watched the *dramatis personæ* in the simple "passion-play" which might at any time be paid off and disbanded.

He saw his children orderly and contented, improving in their studies and in that better training so rare to achieve—habits of self-denial and methodical culture. These were the fruits of association with a loving and capable mind, so far. Was this richly rewarded process to be suddenly suspended, these calmly luxurious hours to be once more discontinued, this fabric of fireside happiness, so recently acquired, to be again destroyed?

If he strove to repair the evil by the choice of another companion, of whom he necessarily must have so much slighter means of acquaintance, what fatal mistake might he not make as had chanced to other men of his acquaintance? There again was the dreadful uncertainty. To whom, then, should he turn for

support and comfort in this emergency if not to her to whom even now he owed so large a debt?

He looked across the room as he revolved these thoughts. Mariana sat, as was her custom, with Rita on one side of her immersed in a book, and the boy Alister, who was less studious-minded, at her feet. Surely in that open brow, in those clear, untroubled eyes, there were no thoughts of selfish triumph, of worldly vanity, of dangerous excitement. Home duties, and these alone, the sober joys of family life, could suffice to fill her well-regulated mind, to make up the sum of this woman's happiness. Who else would love his children as she had done, and whom else would they love?

"The die is cast!" he said to himself as he arose and went to his study. "It is not I, but fate. And it may be that I am compelled to do what is best for us all."

Having thus decided, as far as his plan of action could be carried out without the consent of the person most interested, a feeling of doubt lest whether, after all, she had any feeling towards him but that of kindly toleration commenced to disturb him. However, he wisely resolved not to add the uneasiness of anxiety to his other misfortunes, and holding himself to be justified in shortening the period of probation, and dispensing with merely conventional preliminaries, he prepared to open his heart to Mariana Winstanley without delay.

CHAPTER V

HUGH GORDON now commenced, with this purpose fully before him, to live a more distinctly domestic life than he had hitherto thought necessary. He began the unwonted practice of spending his evenings in the drawing-room, and of remaining after the children were dismissed, a period at which he had been wont to retire to his study, there to pore over authorities undisturbed until the small hours had chimed.

For the first time he began to talk about the

magnum opus to Mariana, asking her opinion about points which he hesitated to decide. She answered with such clear perception of the bearing of the case that he was encouraged to speak freely of the whole matter.

"I have been wishing for some time," she said, "to ask you what progress the book was making."

"And why wish without acting?" he said. "You were not afraid of my displeasure?" Here he smiled so naturally in deprecation of such an absurdity that Mariana could not help laughing.

That pleasant sound—a young girl's sweet unstudied note of merriment—so rare in their abode, smote sweetly upon his senses. Despite his loyalty to the dead, he could not forbear giving ingress to the thought that perhaps even yet the comparative happiness of a serenely cheerful home, of fond devotion and loving tendance, might again be his. Why should he devote the long years of his future life to gloomy retrospect, to hopeless repining? His children, too, would gain unspeakably by securing a continuation of that wise and kindly supervision from which they had profited so largely.

"Do you know I had been thinking seriously," she said, "of offering to help you if you would not scorn a woman's aid. I could copy the sheets fairly, and even look out authorities. I have plenty of spare time."

"I should be relieved," he hastened to reply, "immensely, if you would make extracts from the references which I could point out. Some things I have to confirm, some to refute, of the assertions of former travellers, and I confess to shirking the drier parts of the routine work."

"That would be precisely the part which I should prefer," she said. "I like a steady task, and perhaps you will show me to-morrow what progress you have made, and what is the general scheme of the book."

"To have you for a coadjutor would insure greatly increased rapidity of execution," he answered. "You may come up to the study as early as suits you after breakfast. I sometimes wonder why I, who am so

indifferent to fame, and all expression of opinion from my fellow creatures, should care to labour for such an end. But it was *her* great wish that I should use the talent she always asserted me to possess in this particular way; and I feel that I am acting in unison with her strongest feelings when I resolve on carrying out this intention."

"It is a worthy object, worthily inspired," she made answer, with a kindling air of enthusiasm which illumined her ordinarily calm features to a pitch of absolute beauty. "I cannot imagine labour bestowed upon a more elevating object, and I shall feel honoured in being associated with it."

Daily then, henceforth, did the man and the maiden work for hours, side by side, at this congenial undertaking. All the time that could be spared from the lessons of the children and from needful recreation and exercise was devoted to the task, which grew notably under their joint labour.

Hugh Gordon marvelled to find how much greater interest he took in the regularly applied study and transcription of his notes. How sweet and restful were the intervals of leisure; how wondrously congenial and stimulating was the companionship of a fresh yet cultured and enthusiastic mind.

His days passed now with gliding and peaceful rapidity; he was sensible of an approach to comparative happiness, which startled him. Each day the companionship of Mariana became more desirable, more indispensable. The thought of severance was hateful, and one day, as the twilight shadows came upon them unprepared, so engrossed had each been in their occupation, he drew her to the window, and as they gazed together at the great city's closing pageant he told her of the hope which had grown up in his heart, and prayed her to share the home she had embellished.

"You know better than any woman living," he said, "how little of the passion of love I have to offer—how much lies buried in *her* grave. But if you care to link yourself with the saddened fortunes of this household, the future life of Hugh Gordon lies at your feet. I have but little to give, Heaven knows; but still, I am so

wretched at the thought of losing you, at the possibility of being severed from your companionship that I make you the offer of a broken heart, a shattered life, in all sad earnestness."

At his first words their eyes met, her features expressive of a gradually increasing wonder. Her brow flushed then paled. She seemed as if about to leave the apartment hurriedly. Then stopped irresolute as she saw his deeply pained expression.

He took her hand. "Mariana!" he said, "have no scruple in declaring now that you find it impossible to entertain a feeling stronger than friendship for me, old in heart as I am if not in years. You are too young and joyous to bind yourself to a future so melancholy, so fraught with gloomy memories."

"Do not speak so," she said. "You misunderstand me. I confess to feeling surprised; but nothing you could say would ever wound. If I thought I could add to your happiness or the welfare of the dear children, I would——"

"You would yield yourself to a sense of duty; is it not so? But no! Mariana, I am not ungenerous enough to exact so cruel a sacrifice."

She looked at him for one moment with her clear, childlike eyes, in which every ray shone out with truth and purity.

"It would be no sacrifice," she murmured. "Only that if *you* would be happier——"

. . . . . .

When that time of fullest explanation came which comes in all the early days of lovers, even then, while holding in his arms the only woman who had pleased his fancy or stirred his pulses since the fatal day, even then Gordon was careful to tell her that his heart—the fervent, all-desiring, all-sacrificing heart of the blessed spring-time of youth—lay buried in that strangely quiet graveyard of Southern France, where the aged chestnut trees swept the turf.

"Deepest respect, friendship, gratitude, unswerving kindness she should possess while his life remained to him. More fervent feelings would come with time, doubtless; but would that content her? It was but a

paltry price to offer for a woman's hand, a woman's heart"—and here the sad eyes well-nigh filled as he gazed on the face that was so often associated with the olden days of cloudless happiness. "He was ashamed to put forward his meagre claim. Yet it was all that the cruelty of Fate had left him to bestow."

"You know not the heart of a true woman," she said, laying her delicate hand upon his arm and looking up confidingly into his face, "if you think that I could love you as I do, if I thought you indifferent to the loss of the noble creature we both mourn. I am incapable of giving my love where I could not respect. It has been a plant of slow growth with me, but its roots are deep. And I have been nearly as strongly urged to the step I have taken by the thought that I could brighten the home and console the children of our beloved Marguerite as by any other feeling of my heart. You shall judge if I am able to fulfil my promises."

"I am more than justified already," he said, pressing her to his breast. "Heaven has sent me another angel in the hour of my sorrow. I had not deemed that they still revisited the earth."

They were married, and from that hour the wounds which the heart of Hugh Gordon had received, indelible as they were, ceased to bleed. A deep peace and satisfaction that seemed like joy enveloped his nature. His children were taught and apparently ruled by suasion of love, as they never rebelled and rarely showed a disposition to depart from the path of duty.

His friends were entertained with a grace which charmed those ofttimes severe critics of a freshly-chosen helpmate. Insensibly an air of cheerfulness even of chastened gaiety, pervaded his household, his life, his habitudes.

He commenced to revert ever and ever more dimly to the terrible past, with its passionate love and dread sentence of doom, as to a memory of another existence.

Surely he *was* another man—another creature—when those vivid and awful pictures were first graven on the quivering flesh of his shrinking heart! Even the passion of the past, the volcanic and enthralling sensation of youth commenced—so plastic, so habit-governed is

the human soul—to show in memory's tablets less clear, less perfect in outline than this serene, encircling love of the aftertime—the ceaseless devotion of a tender and beautiful woman, whose every thought on earth below was given to him, and to her God.

"Surely," he thought to himself, "no living man had ever been blessed with two such exemplars of the fair spirits that circle, with eyes sad-pleading for the souls of men, around the Throne! What was he that such gifts of the Divine love should have been granted to him?"

He was now enabled to indulge to the uttermost the taste for literary research which had been previously latent rather than developed. More than this, he was assisted in the work of authorship by the untiring, sympathetic companion whom he had now secured for life, until at length the *magnum opus* made its appearance in the purple and fine linen of the most æsthetic bibliopole of the period. Upon which the fame of Hugh Gordon, the celebrated author, traveller, archæologist, was cried aloud, metaphorically, even from the housetops.

"Dearest Mariana!" he said, "but for you this triumph would never have been mine; but the thought comes over me with resistless force and reality how *she* would have rejoiced in this day's triumph!" and he groaned aloud as he pointed to the volumes which, handsomely bound and lettered, lay on the study table.

"Do not stifle your grief for me, husband mine!" she replied. "Why should we not mingle our tears for her who is now a saint in heaven? Her pure spirit will look down and bless those surely who have never forgotten her, but have carried out her wishes so truly and sincerely."

"We have, we have. Oh love, lost love! couldst thou but behold from the bright empyrean where such stainless souls alone should float, what couldst thou witness to pain thee in our happiness?"

One tribute to the memory of the departed was never omitted. On the anniversary of the dread day which had deprived the household of its guiding star, and left

it dark and desolate, Hugh Gordon had never failed to make a journey to the sanctuary where her mortal remains lay buried. Mariana had willingly consented to accompany him in the sad pilgrimage; had even fancied that it eased his heart and rendered his afterthoughts more untroubled when these mournful offices were performed.

And although it renewed his grief, and at first brought a natural uneasiness to her heart when she saw her husband cast himself upon the green turf and weep over the grave as if it had been freshly dug, still the sweet woman's heart within her rejoiced that she too was loved by so true and tender a nature, whose sacred sorrow Time had no power to dull or to destroy.

And Hugh Gordon, highly imaginative by organisation, thus realised by intuition her inmost sensations, loving her still more deeply for the purity and beauty of the service. When they returned to their home it seemed as if their hearts were even more closely knit—the deep joy and peace of their household still more closely welded. So the months rolled on, and the heart of Hugh Gordon became richer in the joy and sacred peace of happy wedded life.

CHAPTER VI

GRANBY-STREET, Hampstead-road, in which Hugh Gordon's ancestral home had arisen, was sadly changed in character and surroundings since the days of its early grandeur. Yet, though doomed to desertion and abandoned to unfashionable tenants, traces of former greatness were apparent. Foreign ambassadors and mercantile magnates no longer gave a tone of splendour to the locality, but the turreted gateways and hooded pediments remained.

The rooms were lofty; the ceilings were pictured, though the colours were dim with age; while the carven marble chimney-pieces, with classic figures of life-size as supporters, were still the glory of Gordon

House as of other mansions in the vicinity. That the region had become dull—even melancholy—constituted an added charm for Hugh Gordon. The stillness and seclusion were titles to his consideration. More than all, his attachment to the spot was attributable to the fact that he had inherited the house and the land on which it stood. The ancestor by whom the ample fortune which had descended to him had been amassed, had built, had named, had bequeathed to his heirs, the spacious Venetian-looking mansion, with its spacious garden, beneath high walls, ivy-matted and time-worn. The stone arcades, the *parterres*, the long-silent fountain, told of former state and luxury. His wife, his peerless, devoted Marguerite, had with her fine tact and unerring sympathy joined with him heart and soul in fullest appreciation of the honoured home which so many women with half her beauty would have scorned. Together they had loved in summer to sit in the Italian-modelled garden, beneath the shade of aged cedars watching the shadows glide over the soft-hued summer sky, secure from interruption as if embowered in the heart of Vallombrosa.

The brick turreted gateway, mellowed tawny-purple with age, could be discerned at a considerable distance.

It sufficed to mark Gordon House, as it was called, with sufficient distinctness to inquiring strangers.

Enough ground had been reserved sufficient to permit of a carriage entering through the old-fashioned wrought-iron gates and turning before the door of the mansion. This area was, however, so strictly curtailed that unless desired so to do the mercenary charioteers of the period usually preferred to remain in the road.

It happened that the under housemaid, a village girl who had come up with special recommendation to Mrs. Winstanley from their own county, tempted by the beauty of the evening, had opened the outer gate, and standing beneath the ivied shield gazed with still insatiate curiosity upon the passers-by and the ever murmurous human tide which flowed and rippled ceaselessly before her wondering eyes.

As she looked and longed, despite the strange interest of the motley presentment of city life, for "the

vision of trees" which a more celebrated maid-servant was privileged by the poet to realise, "as well as the river" which

"flowed on through the vale of Cheapside,"

a sudden start betokened her return to everyday life.

Her attention was attracted by a cab the driver of which seemed to know his way familiarly to the entrance as he drove through the lofty portal, and came rapidly across to the terrace from which she had stepped.

Looking at the girl for an instant, without speech or questioning, he jumped down, and opening the door of the four wheeler, prepared to assist his fare to alight.

Apparently this service needed a certain amount of aid and preparation, for he stood close by the door, in an attitude of careful respectfulness.

The half-shy, half-curious country lass awaited eagerly, but with a somewhat awe-stricken air, the descent of the visitor. She looked yet more intently as a tall woman, dressed in dark-coloured clothing and with a somewhat foreign air, walked feebly forward.

Her face was covered with a veil. The second step betrayed an inequality of gait which presumed lameness. Her voice was low and broken; there was a foreign accent—so Susan averred—as she spoke thus: "Mr. Gordon lives here? Is he at home?"

As the strange lady uttered these queries, her voice trembled, and she made an eager motion as if to ascend the steps and enter the house. If this was her intention, it was frustrated by two causes acting simultaneously. The first was by her feebleness, which constrained her to stagger and well nigh to fall forward, the other was the prompt interposal of Susan's solid person between her and the open door. Visions of deceivers, of lunatics, of criminals of various shades, flitted across her rustic brain.

"Mr. Gordon and the mistress is both out," declared she, with a certain doggedness of utterance, half defiant, half explanatory of her protective pose.

"Mistress! mistress! and is it so?" ejaculated the

stranger, in a deep broken whisper, so dread and awful in its significance of pain that her auditor instinctively shrank back and partly closed the door. "Did you tell me Mr. Gordon and——"

"Mrs. Gordon, of course," replied the girl, proud of her connection with the family. "And a good mistress she is, if ever there was one. They've gone out for a walk, as they mostly do before dinner, and she told me to keep a look out for nurse and baby, and send them to meet her—blessed lamb!"

"An infant?" again murmured the strange visitor. "Pardon me. I perhaps have mistaken the house. Is it lately that Mr. Gordon has—has been married?"

Susan always averred—further stating that she was prepared to confirm the assertion to her dying day—that she was sure the lady was a Frenchwoman. She had a cousin, a soldier, that married a French milliner-girl, and she talked like that.

A long, long pause. The strange woman leaned heavily on the arm of the cabman; a curious gasping sound, half-sobbing, half-choking, unlike any human voice he had ever heard, made itself apparent.

"Why, of course. Master married Miss Winstanley last May-day was a twelvemonth. He couldn't keep on livin' that lonely all by hisself after his first wife was killed in a railway haccident in France, which he took on dreadful, they say, till he married Miss Mariana, her cousin, and now they're as happy as the day is long. Here they come."

The woman slightly raised her veil and looked in the direction indicated, as did Susan.

"Don't they look nice, 'm?" she continued, with instinctive talkativeness. "There's Mrs. Gordon a-hangin' on his arm. Such pretty hair she has; no wonder master took to her. There's the boy and girl belongin' to the first wife. They're that fond of her you'd think they were her own. And the baby! such a beauty he is—it's a pleasure to see Mr. Gordon a-playin' with 'im; that it is."

All at once Susan stopped. One look which she caught from dark eyes burning like lamps in their hollow sockets; one glance of mingled fear, sorrow,

and despair froze her blood, as she afterwards expressed it, and made her true to her first doubt as to whether the stranger was not a lunatic.

"Died in France, killed in a railway accident," she groaned. "You were right, *she* died there. I have heard so. I—I—Drive me from the place, cabman; and, do you hear? quickly, for the love of God!"

As her voice rose almost to a scream in the last word, she clung piteously to the immovable driver with one hand—what tragedies had he not witnessed, at what passages of destiny had he not assisted!—with the other she raised before his eyes a gold coin.

"Right, m'm!" he answered. "Lean on me. Good-bye, miss!" he added covertly to Susan. "Queer fares these furrin parties. Mistook the house. Mistook the house, seems to me, must ha' done."

The door of the cab was closed. The half-fainting form of the occupant fell across the cushions as the driver hustled up his horse and passed through the gates a few moments before Hugh Gordon sauntered up. His wife was hanging upon his arm, looking up into his face with unutterable fondness, ever and anon drawing his attention to the sleeping babe that, in his nurse's arms, was close behind them. It was a picture of that calm-flowing happiness which no feverish joy can simulate—which no earthly pleasure can equal.

"I never dreamed that I should be again so blest on earth," he had just murmured to the fair woman at his side, out of whose blue eyes glowed the sacred flame which, once lighted by Hymen's torch, earthly cloud or tempest has no power to quench.

"We are so happy," she returned, with a fond pressure of his arm to her heart. "Why do people persist in saying that there is no perfect happiness on earth?"

"Mother," said Alister, who had just returned from an excursive race after an unwilling Skye terrier, "there's a cab just come out of our gate. I wonder who it was? Susan says she saw a lady in it looking at us, and she seemed ill."

"We must ask Susan," answered Mariana. "If it

were not against your principles, Hugh dearest, I would ask you to have our name legibly written up on the outer gateway. So many people seem to make mistakes about the house."

"Let them," he answered somewhat quickly. "A brass plate or a painted address on Gordon House! It would be an anachronism which I could not endure."

"Ought we not to consider others just a little?" she pleaded, looking softly at his fixed countenance. "That woman may have been ill or poor, in which case she has suffered disappointment, by mistaking our house for Madame Faucher's. There is always some foreigner making the same blunder."

"You are right, as usual," he said, returning her loving glance, and looking down admiringly on her serene features. "I must try and find you in the wrong some day, by way of change. Hoxton and I may be able to work in the family name and legend æsthetically, and yet so that the stranger, and the pilgrim, and the butcher, and the baker may decipher."

"And you spoil me," she whispered. "You always will, won't you, darling?"

And they walked in through the old-fashioned gateway, where such various types of humanity had been wont to pass and repass, silent and self-absorbed in that deep conviction of tranquil love which no gust of passion, no treacherous undercurrent of human nature, no maelstrom of the heart can o'erwhelm.

The lamps were lit, and "cheerful evening ushered in," when Mariana, who had been deep in unusual reverie, said, "Hugh, dearest, I wonder who that woman was in the cab that was just leaving the gate as we returned? Did you notice her?"

"One of Madame Faucher's lodgers, I suppose," said he, looking up uninterestedly from a new book. "I must really remonstrate with her. The nuisance is becoming serious."

"I have been having a talk with Susan," she continued, "and she says there was something strange about her: that she was either ill or in great grief about something."

"Very possibly," replied her husband without look-

ing up from the page, "though I should not take Susan for a close observer. Many people are ill and sufficiently sorrowful too in this world of London."

"Susan says she spoke English well, but with a foreign accent, and afterwards to herself in French or Italian."

"How did she know?" murmured he. "It might have been Russian. Perhaps it was Vera Sassulich, or some other Nihilist on the warpath."

"Now do listen, dearest, and leave off that eternal reading for a few minutes," she added, putting her hand over the fair, white, neatly-cut page. "Don't you think it was curious that she seemed to know about the house, and yet was so anxious to get away the moment she saw us approaching?"

"My innocent darling," said Gordon, shutting his book and looking half-tenderly, half-regretfully into the sweet eyes of this persistent disturber of his literary peace. "How is it possible for us to know the lives of all the foreigners who make exactly the same class of mistakes in this unfashionable neighbourhood? Some one described Madame Faucher's establishment carefully to her, and as it unhappily resembles our house, particularly as to the entrance gate, she was unwilling to own herself in the wrong. If she came in the tidal train from Paris she was probably just recovering from sea-sickness."

"But she asked if you were married, most anxiously, too, Susan said. Why should she do that?"

"How can I tell, darling? I *am* married, and to a wife who will not let me read peaceably, and does not care if I become more ignorant every day. But I will call upon Madame Faucher to-morrow, if it will afford you any satisfaction, and air my French, while I inquire if her lodger had any ulterior views in besieging Gordon House."

"That is so good of you. And now you may study in peace for a reward, as I am going into the nursery for half-an-hour. I promised to read something to Rita before she went to sleep. She has been a little feverish with her cold."

"My children have had two mothers," he thought to himself, as he watched with half-unconscious fondness

her graceful movement as Mariana glided from the room. "How rarely such good fortune must happen in this lottery which we call life. I, too, who so despaired of the gloom being ever dissipated that shrouded my being. Ah! me."

He could not repress a deep sigh to the memory of the loved—the lost. And yet how chastened the regret from the terrible throes in which his heart had bewailed the grief that could not be healed—the inexorable death-sentence, that prayer, nor weeping tears of blood, could reverse! How little had he dreamed of this return to Paradise, if not the Aidenn of youth's newly created joys, still the sweet restful bower where sorrow enters not, nor the dark-winged demons bear their sombre summons.

Hugh Gordon was not suffered to forget his promise to sift out this mystery. Susan under cross-examination had stoutly adhered to her former statement, even adding details, such as that "the lady was tall, that she was lame; that she only saw her eyes when she lifted her veil, which were 'like coals of fire'—fair frightened, that she was; that she spoke like a Frenchwoman, not broken English; that she either fainted or was took with a fit as the cabman drove off."

Here was material for speculation. Why should the strange lady have asked if the master of the house was married? Why express emotion when told that he was? Why come in at the gateway as if she knew the house?

Mariana, whose contemplative nature had not indisposed her towards the exercise of her imagination, felt urged towards half-forgotten tales of mystery and fear. Had there been any friend or acquaintance of Hugh's who had the right to reappear and question of his circumstances?

Gordon, again, whose mental constitution was of that class which declines exertion for the most part save in directions agreeable or exciting, smiled at his wife's eagerness to solve the enigma.

"Why trouble herself about a chimæra—an unsubstantial figment of the fancy? Was this the first foreign fugitive that the unfortunate similarity of their home to the Pension Faucher had brought upon them?

All foreign fugitives were poor—most of them sick, vehement of speech and gesture, such as the English village intelligence is prone to regard as akin to lunacy. However, Madame Faucher would clear up all doubts. He was going to see her at once, immediately, before he went to his club.

He was as good as his word. Once put in motion, Hugh Gordon was active and capable in an unusual degree. It was the initiative which, like other men of his type, he found distasteful.

The "Maison Faucher, Pension Française," was not situated at any distance from his own house. Like it, the great ones of the earth had formerly abode there. Rich brocaded silks had rustled therein; down the wide staircase had swept noble dames. By the windows so deeply embayed had lounged princes and peers, ambassadors and diplomats; pages had kept watch and ward in the ante-chambers. Royalty itself had not disdained to feast and to flirt there.

But with the tide of modern progress these pleasant functions had faded gradually, had slowly perished, had altogether passed away. The lofty rooms with storied friezes and faded gilding, had come to witness the lives of tenants lower and lower in the social scale, until at length Madame Celine Faucher, *née* Dubois, had, through an agent, secured a lease of the premises and promptly set to work to render them attractive to such of her compatriots as fate and an attenuated purse compelled to dwell in the chief city of perfidious Albion.

To do madame justice, want of energy could not have been the reason of her having missed the goal of success in life. She converted the two largest rooms into a fair imitation of a Palais Royale café. The cooking was delicate. The wines were undeniable. The tariff moderate. The lodging quiet and respectable. To her speedily came all sorts and conditions of men—and indeed women—whose ways and walks, manners and customs, were wont to excite alarm, mingled with curiosity, in the breasts of the neighbouring citizens.

Long-haired, swarthy, pipe-smoking, closely-buttoned individuals were they for the most part. Patriots,

exiles, professors of dancing, teachers of languages, conspirators, regicides, carbonari—who or what they were it was impossible to tell. The women were also various of aspect, and provokingly inscrutable. They were old and middle-aged, wrinkled and careworn; they were young and coquettish, smiling and audacious; poorly or richly dressed—but always true to the tastefulness which the Frenchwoman throws into all her costumes, of whatever class or character. These last especially were living mysteries and marvels.

Madame Faucher, too, a plump fair personage, with keen grayish-blue eyes—more like a German than a Frenchwoman—was not supposed to indulge unjustifiable curiosity.

When accosted by the insatiable British querist as to any remarkable looking member of the household, she had a way of forgetting his or her name at the moment—of being in doubt as to the occupation, and strangely oblivious of the precise locality they had quitted last.

At other times she was frank and unreserved, impartially surrendering facts and figures concerning the individual referred to. But those who professed to know her best averred that she had a trick of lying pleasantly and unscrupulously on such subjects whenever such a course of proceeding was expedient.

For which and other reasons the dwellers in her immediate neighbourhood had come to regard madame as being of kin to the sphinx and other fascinating but dangerous creations.

CHAPTER VII

With this lady, Hugh Gordon had several times conferred on trivial occasions, led into dialogue as being one of the few English people in the vicinity who spoke French fluently. He was therefore a favourite with madame, who enjoyed the formal compliments which occasionally slipped from his tongue, clothed in the language of *la belle* France.

"In this social wilderness"—*ce pays affreux*—"is it not good," she would say: "once upon a time, to behold the face and hear the voice of *un gentilhomme parfaitment comme il faut*—do you not see?"

When Gordon alighted from his cab, he paused for a moment to gaze earnestly at the house where Madame Faucher entertained her compatriots. Not that she was averse to lodging and providing for exiles from other lands. But from circumstances she was certainly more patronised by emigrants from France than from other continental countries.

Her *chef* was as good as she could afford. They praised her dinners, while they abused the climate, the people, the usages of a land which was to some of them so secure a refuge—to all so kindly and safe a retreat.

The appointments of the house were good. The dining rooms and *salons* were gay with mirrors and bright with gilding. The waiters were French, the chambermaids English. If any gentleman or lady, for reasons of their own, desired to be especially private, there were suites of apartments which no one entered without notice, and where only particular attendants showed themselves. A little picquet or *écarté*, with stakes graduated to the taste of the players, might always be reckoned on. But for those who did not—from delicate health or a retiring disposition—care to trust themselves in so popular an establishment, how discreetly kept soever as that of madame, there were quiet lodgings kept by friends of hers, in very retired streets; so quiet indeed that their names were difficult to discover and were only mentioned to the intending lodger, who was advised to descend from the cab before quite reaching the address, so as to avoid taking that all but indispensable agent, the cabdriver, into their confidence. In fact, so numerous were the precautions taken to secure the quiet, almost the secrecy of her lodgers, her *bons enfants*, that a suspicious person might have imagined that some of them had only too good reason to conceal their identity.

However that may have been Gordon could not help wondering whether there had been any kinship between the owners or builders of the two houses that they

should have been built precisely on the same plan and resembled each other so closely. His own house had certainly been restored from time to time, and with its surroundings of courtyard, garden, and boundary wall in scrupulously good order had of course an advantage. The modern portions enhanced the grimly venerable look of the older architecture.

Now, the foreign lodging house, by which name it was known in the neighbourhood, had to a certain extent the forlorn air which a building, which is only an abiding place and not a home, so soon contracts. The courtyard was untidy, the walls were in places crumbling to decay; the garden wore a damp and gloomy air. But in spite of all, the general effect of the grand old pile was imposing, while the portals were wonderfully similar, though ornamented with a brass plate, on which "Madame Faucher, Pension Française," was plainly set forth in broad letters.

"I must bring Mariana to see this house," he said to himself. "It is out of her way, and I doubt if she has passed it more than once. Any one would understand how the mistake was made. But I must make my bow to madame or she will take me for a *mouchard*, and shut her gates and her heart against me."

Whereupon he entered and caused one of the waiters to take his card and say that he desired the honour of an interview with madame. The *garçon* smiled approval on hearing a Parisian accent, and reappearing shortly, desired that monsieur would be pleased to give himself the trouble to follow him. In a snug morning-room sat the *châtelaine*, only provisionally apparelled and in slippers, which displayed more tendency to comfort than elegance.

Bowing in a manner which half convinced his hostess that she had not to deal with an Englishman, and on that account half aroused suspicion that his errand was unfriendly to some one of her lodgers, he began his questioning.

Madame inclined herself with the aplomb of an ambassadress. "She would be enchanted to afford Monsieur Gordon any information in her power."

He then explained that a lady had called at his house

yesterday, about the time he and Mrs. Gordon were returning from an afternoon walk. She was apparently agitated or unwell. Her luggage—one portmanteau—was with her in the cab. The cabman had driven hurriedly away. He presumed that his house had been mistaken for the admirable, the celebrated Pension Française, which outwardly it so much resembled.

"*Et puis?*" demanded madame, her face wreathed in smiles at the latter compliment. "In what way could she impress herself to oblige monsieur?"

"Madame would pardon him—would perfectly comprehend, when he mentioned that his wife was a little curious to know the name, and if possible, the state of health of the lady who had interested them. If, as was probable, she was now staying at the Pension Française and there was no indiscretion in requiring so much, the information might be afforded by madame?"

"Madame would be filled with joy to offer to monsieur and his amiable wife so small a service. In the first place, would monsieur describe as accurately as possible the lady? Several ladies had arrived yesterday, some had remained, others had removed to lodgings secured for them beforehand."

"Monsieur was not quite sure. The servant had said the lady was tall, was slight, not perhaps robust in health—of a pallor *interessant*. In brief, dressed in black, apparently a little lame. She could not well be sure, it was an accident probably."

"Madame would consult her note-book. She always entered each arrival and departure. "Madame Maurotte, stout, fair, expecting her husband, a wealthy Burgundian, by the next mail. Mademoiselle de Gautier, tall, dark, elderly, is engaged at a girls' school at Clapham as French teacher."

Gordon shook his head.

"Madame Melfort, medium height, dark hair, stout, voluble, is in the Pension but now. Would monsieur wish to see her?"

He made a gesture of disapproval and denial.

"Were there no others?"

"No others, no more. But yes! madame had forgotten. There was Madame Hoche, her husband had been

killed in Algeria; she herself had suffered from fever, from asthma, from accidental injury. Her health was melancholy. Ah, *mon Dieu!* Yes, how injured, how shattered! Tall, yes! dark, *passablement belle*, a brunette of long ago; a sad history."

"Indeed, *quel douleur!* and was she within?"

"But no! she had inquired about lodgings, where in peace and solitude she could attend to her religious duties, and in charity and good works complete her few remaining years."

"Why did she live in London?"

"She had come away from her husband's friends in France in the south, near Montpellier, they could not agree. What will you have? These relatives of one's husband they are *voleurs*, brigands." Here madame became dramatic.

"It was a historiette of the most interesting, and the poor lady, she took the lodgings indicated by madame?"

"I shall know to-morrow. I will inform monsieur accurately when I return. She is fortunate—she speaks English, she has learned *le grammaire*. In Algeria she had a friend of your nation—a nation chivalresque, monsieur! *instruiteà marveil.* She taught herself the English as a preservation against *ennui.*"

"My wife will be overwhelmed with obligation to madame. I will inform her, and hope for further information?"

"But assuredly, monsieur!"

"And the lady—she had then mistaken my house, as is frequently the case, for the Pension Française?"

"But, yes! she had instructed the *cocher-bête*—that he should be—to drive to a house with a 'place'—with a *comme-ça*, and she pointed through the window to the dilapidated heraldic beast crowning one of the gate pillars. He makes to place her in your house—she interrogates the domestic—she adjures him to return her—he refuses—she shows him the gold—she is weak, ill, what you call 'delicate'—she swoons on the cushion—she awakes—she is here. What would you have? I reproach him. *Ma foi!* I threaten to take him before *le Lor' Maire!*"

Hugh Gordon laughed at the tragic intensity of

madame's declaration, realising too how the girl had probably mistaken the natural impatience of an invalid when convinced of the cabman's mistake for a more mysterious line of conduct.

He returned to his house after spending the rest of the day in London at his club, and earned a sweet smile by entering into full detail and supplying a half humorous account of his interview with Madame Faucher.

"She will write to-morrow, she has promised me. And she looks like a woman that will keep her word, for good or ill," he added.

"What trouble you have taken, and how good you are to me always!" murmured she.

On the next day came a scented and ornamented billet, in which was written in a cramped, French hand the further information desired by monsieur, which in effect amounted to this: "That Madame Hoche had taken the lodgings indicated, which were situated in No. 17, Knight-street. That the fatigue and excitement had overpowered her in her terribly weak state of health. Did she convey the information to monsieur *par hasard*, that Madame Hoche had been wounded, dreadfully injured, and left for dead, near Oran, when taken by the Arabs! Ah, yes! *vraiment blessée.* Ah, *mon Dieu!* the scars were piteous to see. She is confined to bed even now; but in a fortnight she might probably be sufficiently restored to thank Monsieur and Madame Gordon for the kind interest they had taken in her. With the deepest feelings of respect, and consideration the most distinguished, she had the privilege of signing herself, "their most obliged and honoured, CELINE FAUCHER."

"How wonderfully polite French people are!" said Mariana. "I wish I could always believe in their sincerity. But it is civil of her to take so much trouble. It explains everything. No wonder the poor thing was disappointed. I shall take quite an interest in her, and will go and call some day when she is stronger. May I, husband?"

"You may always do whatever that kind heart of yours dictates," said he; "it will never lead you astray."

No after-tremor of anxiety vexed the souls of Hugh Gordon and his wife. The matter had been fully laid to rest by the explanation of Madame Faucher and the curious similarity of the houses. Yet, since the dawn of history, men have dreamed that subtle agencies are at work, viewless, soundless, none the less potent, which warn the spirit when the bodily senses are unstirred.

Such visitants may have signalled to the soul of Mariana Gordon when the stranger's visit to their gate was made known to her. The whisper of the dark wing of the angel of sorrow was in the air.

But the explanation of her husband, the practised evasion of Madame Faucher, had satisfied her. The peace of their Eden was unshadowed as of old. All things relapsed into the unbroken domestic harmony with which their life flowed on.

And yet could they have known the truth? How dangerously close they had been to doom, to despair, to the knowledge of guilt, involuntary, but still guilt of fact and deed, to hopeless sorrow—to endless remorse.

For the pale woman, with the foreign face and speech, the halting step, was in very truth none other than she whom all deemed dead—yes, dead and buried, sleeping the long sleep beneath the rose-strewn turf in the cemetery of Montpellier.

The woman—faint, pallid, sick even unto death—who dragged her enfeebled frame back from the door of her once happy home—who nerved herself to the terrible necessity to renounce home and refrain from happiness, hungered and thirsted after—oh! so long—was no other, in fact and truth, than Marguerite, the beloved wife of Hugh Gordon! And yet—oh sublime and saintly sacrifice!—all voluntarily she withdrew from the gate of Heaven. She herself, with her own hand, locked against herself the gates of Paradise!

Still, how, in the name of all that is unreal and phantasmal—how came about this ghastly reality, more strange and dreadfully dramatic than all the fancies of fiction—than all the fabricated horrors of the stage—those mimic sins and sorrows of a mimic world?

Did not Hugh Gordon see the poor remnants of the

mortal frame of her he loved so well and mourned so deeply carried to the grave, wrapped in the sealskin cloak he so easily recognised which he had last seen on the fair form of his Marguerite? Did he not wear on his breast, and still cherish fondly in those hours when the heart will return to past days—when long buried sorrows steal from their graves—a tress of hair, shorn from her marble brow?

Had he not paid lavishly to have her grave bedecked and adorned? Did he not make pilgrimage to it? Had he not watered it with his tears and thrown himself upon the turf, now so green, above where her mortal frame — where his heart (how passionately had he vowed)—lay buried? Then how should this thing be? Can the grave give up its dead? Can the laws of nature be reversed? Whence then had this *revenante* emerged to mock the dead, to trouble the living?

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN the awful collision occurred that in a few seconds changed the well-filled train into a procession of ambulances, filled with the living and dead, it was Marguerite's companion, Madame Hoche (the once beautiful Lady Delacour), who was killed. Mutilated by the first concussion and terribly torn by the splinters of a neighbouring carriage, she was one of the first victims that were carried away and buried; fully identified, as was supposed, on the testimony of Hugh Gordon himself, who had at once recognised on the corpse his wife's sealskin cloak. The height, the colour of the hair, the general *tournure*, were alike in both women. Gordon's frantic search having been in this sad manner proved successful but little trouble was taken with reference to the fate of Madame Hoche, under which name the strange lady, poor and now unfriended, alas! had been travelling.

She was found in a dying state, almost unrecognisable, it was stated, suffering from concussion of the brain and other injuries. With certain other sufferers she was placed in the ward of the Montpellier Hospital, to which those were carried whom the doctor had "condemned." Of these the greater proportion died. They were buried by the state, or handed over to the friends who, in some instances, had come long distances to perform the last sad offices.

In the case of "Madame Hoche," the dark-haired woman who lay in the dismal ward whence so many corpses had been carried out, though unconscious and in great danger, the patient successfully combated the great enemy. For several weeks she lay in a half-unconscious condition. Her brain was partially affected, and her fragmentary utterances and entreaties to be allowed to send for her husband were dismissed as the harmless illusions which heralded a return to convalescence.

Long and severe was the struggle between life and death. Strangely, curiously (dare we say fortunately?) the surgeon in charge of the hospital was an enthusiast in his profession. He saw in this obscure and penniless "Madame Hoche" one of the most astonishing instances of partial recovery, after the base of the skull had been injured and the arachnoid membrane actually inflamed, that science had ever chronicled.

A chivalrous son of science, he pitted himself single-handed against the Destroyer, and after months of applied skill succeeded in placing his patient on the comparatively firm ground of restored reason and the possibility of ordinary health. That is, if she could be secured careful and intelligent nursing for at least another year. She must be kept perfectly quiet. She must be fed with exactness according to a dietary scale. She must never be allowed to excite herself about certain topics and illusions. Her mind must, if possible, be preserved in a condition free from anxiety. If all this were done—and neglect might at any time reduce her to hopeless idiocy or cause death within twenty-four hours—in another year the patient might possibly be trusted to her own guidance. But in no less time

than a year should she be liberated from gentle restraint and the privilege of constant medical supervision.

"Does any one sane of mind think it possible," he would continue, "not to say probable, that these conditions, involving the maximum of fatigue, care, and responsibility, coupled with the minimum of reward, or even acknowledgment, could be complied with outside of a convent?"

In all his experience no nurses save *les religieuses* could be trusted with a task requiring high intelligence and devoted patience.

Near the scene of the disaster—so near that the nuns were in all cases among the best and most successful nurses of the hospital—stood the ancient abbey of St. Pierre, now changed into a convent of the Sisters of Sacred Pity.

From the time of the catastrophe, one of the nuns—Sister Françoise—had devoted herself to the ward in which lay the *ci-devant* "Madame Hoche." The pale sweet face of the nun had grown paler in the chamber as one lifeless form after another was borne away to the room appointed for the dead.

The feebly flickering spirit which still informed the tortured frame of "Madame Hoche" strangely interested her. She devoted herself to the case with an ardour which amazed the attendants. What was there in this melancholy or delirious sufferer to call forth such excessive tenderness? Was she then a relative, a compatriot, a person of family that might one day make recompense? But no! Her worldly possessions were all contained in a shabby and worn portmanteau; while the English lady's luggage—beautiful and expensive as it was, in her grand large-sized family trunk—had been so easily recognised by her husband, the English milord, who was generous. Ah, *mon Dieu!* it was a pleasure to serve such a man: *gentilhomme*, or baron surely, a prince of the blood—only noble blood could have been so munificent, so truly charitable towards poor hospital nurses and attendants.

But surely she had died; as surely was committed to the grave. Did not her husband bear back with him a lock of the hair he had so often kissed and

admired? Was not the sealskin cloak cast over her crushed and shattered form? How, save by death, could her total silence, her long protracted absence, be accounted for?

Ah me! how sore a mischance, how merciless had fate been to her!—to her that deserved, if ever mortal woman did, Heaven's choicest blessing!

When the awful shock, sudden and whelming as an avalanche, burst upon them; when the horrible grinding rending noises had ceased; when the shrieks had died away and the groans commenced, those who came to lift the dead and succour the living found the two women lying motionless side by side.

One of the guards had heard at the previous station of the rich English miladi with the sealskin cloak, and also of another lady, originally from the same land, who had been living in poverty in Lyon Perrache. Her history, too, was known. Her flight, her after life. The desertion, too, of him who had wrecked her existence.

The dead woman was so mangled and disfigured that the minor fact of the mantle was suffered to stand, as indeed was most feasible, for more identification of her. The other one was supposed at first to be dead or dying. No hope was entertained of her recovery. She was borne in a semi-unconscious state to the Hospital of St. Madeleine. There for days—for weeks indeed—Marguerite Gordon lay in a state of stupor. Her hair had been closely cut, her *lingerie*, hastily removed, had been stolen by an attendant in the confusion of the disaster, thus preventing all future identification. Thus reclothed in the hospital garb, and unrecognisable except by closest scrutiny, at the very time when Hugh Gordon was searching in the immediate vicinity, examining the mournful company of dead and dying, his beloved, his peerless wife lay unheeded for hours upon a pallet in the accident ward in St. Madeleine!

Could he but have known! Angel of God! was there none to have apprised him that she for whom he sorrowed almost unto death was still living, wreck of her former beauty and comeliness that she was?

Could he but have seen her then, he would have knelt by her bedside weeping for joy like a child. He would have tended her night and day. She would have absorbed his whole interest in this world and the next. The question of her recovery would have been one of life or death to himself. Yet this sad privilege was inscrutably denied him. He was doomed to return to his home with despair in his soul, with a feeling akin to loathing in his heart for all things under the sun.

Slowly the brain recovered its full consciousness. The wounds healed, though scars remained. The feeble form slowly—by such degrees that ofttimes the physician deemed his toil in vain—gained vital strength. But gradually the imprisoned faculties, like captives long debarred from liberty, recovered their functions, though exercising them with a timidity which told of the season of disuse.

It was as nearly as possible a year and a half when Marguerite Gordon had so far recovered in mind and body as to make the essay to return to her home.

But when she commenced to mention the circumstances of her case, she encountered the most perplexing incredulity on the part of the attendants, utter disbelief from the physician. Provincial people, and strong in the narrow obstinacy which the absence of the world's friction engenders, they absolutely refused to believe her tale. They called her "Madame Hoche," by which name Lady Delacour had been known in the suburb of Lyons where she had dwelt for years.

They led her to the trim, well-planted cemetery and showed her the exquisitely cut marble tomb whereon her own name was legibly inscribed:

"To the dear memory of
MARGUERITE,
the beloved wife of
HUGH GORDON.
Killed in the railway accident of December, 186—"

The shock was too great for her enfeebled frame, for the weary brain, so lately the home of halting

fancies or dull vacuity. The terrible feeling took possession of her that after all perhaps her idea of her own identity might be one of the hallucinations of the disease. She fell to the earth as one dead. She suffered a relapse, and when comparatively recovered found herself in the Asylum of St. Jean for the reception of imbeciles.

Here she was kindly treated, affectionately ministered to, but environed, as it were, with a fatal assumption that she was a poor woman whom the injuries of the collision had rendered mad, whose harmless delusion was that she was Mrs. Gordon, the wife of the rich Englishman who came every year to weep by his wife's grave, to strew flowers upon it, and to rain napoleons with equal profusion among the poor who had the good fortune to live near the spot. No wonder they were unwilling to disturb an accepted version of facts so favourable to the village. More than once had she endeavoured when her reason was again fully restored to enlist the sympathies of the medical superintendent of the institution in her favour. Most unfortunately for her, he was a personage of by no means enlarged understanding, still further narrowed by national prejudice.

He was possessed by a violent Anglophobia. In his estimation all English people were mad. It was only a question of degree. Some had incipient mania, some simulated sanity, more or less successfully. Others, overbearing, arrogant, reckless, had the national malady in a violent and pronounced state.

"This Anglaise, therefore, was plainly suffering from a mild but obstinate form of melancholia.

"She had been rescued from amid the dying and the dead. By an accidental treatment—due most likely to her insular robustness of constitution—not by any means to the skill of that overrated pretender, Monsieur Moncœur—she had survived injuries which would have killed half-a-dozen *spirituelles* Françaises. In requital for all this trouble—for this bounty of Heaven—what but that she goes to regard herself as the great English miladi who was killed at the same time—who lies peacefully and virtuously buried in Montpellier? She

was deranged—possessed by an evil spirit—sent here to plague him—Daubigny. He had known she was mad at the commencement, and mad he would always assert her to be."

It has generally been considered a difficult thing to prove sanity with sufficient clearness to emerge from a respectable British Asylum. There the patient has compatriots on all sides, a fair hearing in the vernacular —a just and impartial tribunal to which to appeal. And yet how many a victim of original error, dulness, or chicanery has worn away a lifetime in hopeless incarceration, unless tales be untrue!

Is the patient angry or excited, naturally at this injustice, it is the unreasonable fury of the maniac; calm, mild, reasonable?—the art of the lunatic resigned; —it is the stupor of mania; watchful and alert; the dangerous restlessness before an outbreak.

If such be so in England, how miserably hopeless and despairing soon came to be the situation of Marguerite Gordon, surrounded by foreign prejudice, powerless before an unyielding foregone conclusion. How often did she pray for that which had been so close; exhaust herself in tearful cries and entreaties before the throne of God that she might be released from this lingering death, this direful captivity!

Day after day wore on; the dreary winter, not perhaps so rigorous in that southern angle of France, but gloomy as Arctic ice-wastes to her, without change, exercise, society, or occupation. Of this last she secured a certain amount by offering to do needlework for the female attendants. In old days a matchless designer, an artist in fancy work, she was almost equally good in ordinary sewing. This talent served her in good stead now. After accidentally discovering that her attendant had disposed of a piece of ornamental needlework to a visitor, she made a compact to provide materials, and to share the proceeds.

To this the sordid attendant, mean-souled and greedy —so indeed, unhappily, are many of those who can be induced to take such offices—readily acceded. From this moment a ray of light broke in upon her desolate condition. She found herself by this arrangement sup-

plied with full occupation; in the future she foresaw that she would be able to provide herself with money, the judicious use of which might lead to her ultimate freedom—even to an escape to England.

To England—to home! to the loved and sorrowing husband; to him who doubtless still mourned, if not stricken down with the anguish of the blow. To the darling children; those angels of her love; those portions of her very being; and might she indeed see them again?

Joy, joy unspeakable! Heaven itself could surely have none superior to these. The tears welled over from the o'ercharged lids that had known so much weeping of late. She looked around on the bare white-washed walls, on the scanty bed, the unsympathising attendants, whose measured footsteps and expressionless countenances gave them a resemblance to cunningly devised automata. All seemed a death in life—an ante-chamber of the grave—more dismal, more unnatural than even that grave could be. Why had she not died? Why even now was she so cruelly restored to life? Life! Was this life? Was it not a portion of the punishment eternal to which all but the elect were doomed? She clasped her hands around her burning brow, and strove to acquire a calmness, a stolid repose which should prepare her for the effort still necessary to be made.

CHAPTER IX

More than once did Marguerite Gordon make an attempt to elude the vigilance of her guardians; but though much of her former firmness of mind had returned, she was no match for the catlike cunning with which the female attendants watched her every movement. It is a strange fact that the women employed at gaols, reformatories, and madhouses are more apt to take unreasonable dislikes to the wretched creatures under their control than are male warders. It

may be that the melancholy seclusion, and unnatural restriction of their own lives, operate perversely upon their natures. However it may be accounted for, the fact remains established by the evidence of close observers and impartial witnesses.

Unfortunately for the unhappy *détenue* the nurse immediately in charge of the ward to which she belonged had conceived a strong personal dislike to her. This sentiment, Manon—such was her name—demonstrated in a hundred ingenious ways, which only a woman could have imagined who had given thought to the question of refined persecution. She had adopted the theory of the surgeon superintendent, M. Daubigny, improving upon it with an inventive power all her own.

"Madame la Duchesse!" she would say, with a mock obeisance of exaggerated deference, "I am desolated not to be able to procure warm water for your bath, but the morning is so cold that the fire refuses to burn. But what! I know les Anglaises disdain our luxurious ways."

In the freezing weather of the bitter midwinter, this woman who had left a home so lately where her every want was anticipated, was compelled daily to lave her shivering limbs in the ice-cold water, and to remain, chilled to the bone, till midday, before a fire was lighted in the bare, uncarpeted room, where she and a wretched maniac dwelt together.

In vain did she try to conciliate "*la chatte des bois*," as the other women called Manon Lepage, with soft words, with entreaties not to wound one already so sorely stricken. She had but one assailable side, she was avaricious. She loved and hoarded money. This weapon of offence and defence Marguerite unhappily did not possess. And who that knows the world will deny that it is both sword and shield? Ah! how much had she lost! This forlorn creature, forsaken of God and man? Only home, husband, children, happiness, liberty, beauty! Was she to be deprived of reason itself? She felt convinced that she would fall to that level if she remained another year in this soulless, lifeless tomb, a monastery without the consolation of religious duties, a prison without its security.

Sadly but calmly Marguerite summoned to her aid all the resources of her still powerful mind. Weak as was her body, retarded, too, from perfect recovery, by the systematic neglect and ill-treatment of her guardian, she aroused herself to a full consideration of her position. Should the summer pass without change in her position, she felt a conviction that she was lost. She could never survive another long, dreadful, desolate winter. She assumed now of settled purpose a stolid immobility, taking care to strengthen herself by means of food and sleep as much as possible. She trusted to the spring which was approaching to bring her opportunity or inspiration. Among the women was one named Melanie, who alone of the attendants had seemed disposed to show kindness to the sad, proud Englishwoman whom it was the fashion to ill-treat. She was a quick-tempered, dark-eyed Southerner from the sands of Olonne. She had engaged herself here for a term in a transport of jealous rage against her lover.

Too obstinate to own herself in the wrong, or too prudent to break her engagement in the hospital, she had remained. She expected besides a sum of money—small perhaps, in itself, but large to her and to her simple kindred.

To Marguerite she had confided her sorrows in the rare intervals which she could steal for conversation. From her she had received wise womanly advice. Owing to her Christian counsels she had become reconciled to her lover, who was waiting impatiently for her release.

"We are eating our hearts out, Alphonse and I," said she; "but what will you? I am proud, though I am not a *grande dame* like you. I know you are; though that white-lipped, white eye-lashed '*chatte des bois*' denies it. I hate her! I hate her! I should like to throw her down and trample on her. I am sure I shall do so before I leave."

"You should not cherish feelings of vengeance, Melanie, even though she is a bad woman. Your curé will tell you that. When shall you leave?"

"The term of my imprisonment will end itself in

Août, — what you Anglais call Au-guste. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"So, you will be free to go away in August, Melanie. Listen to me, do you think I am mad?"

"Not more than my mother is, *ma chère mère*, to whom I was so wicked, for which has not *le bon Dieu* punished me? Why do they keep you in here?"

"Because the doctor is foolish, or he would know better; but he believes that I am mad, and that I think I am the woman that I am not."

"So they all say, and yet you talk, how softly, how sweetly, madame, and your face is soft like that of an angel. Yet, yet, how is Madame de Gordone in her grave; and yet, you say, you are her! How comes that to be?"

Here the girl clasped her hands with all the warmth of her Southern nature, and looked up eagerly to the sad worn face with her black Italian-seeming eyes, as if wondering yet shuddering as at a mystery beyond the grave.

"Listen to me, Melanie, I will tell you—sit down at my feet—you are young—you have been unhappy—but your heart is generous and brave. God grant you may be happy yet, my child! Did you hear anything of a sealskin cloak—a costly mantle of furs—which was found on the corpse of her they buried as the wife of the rich Englishman—of Madame Gordone, as they call her name here—of me?"

"Oh! but yes. That so wonderful sealskin cloak; it was worth more than a thousand francs. It was fit for the daughter of the Czar of Russia. No one but an English milord would give his wife so costly a present."

"That sealskin cloak was mine—mine, Melanie! My dear husband bought it for me. I scolded him when he told me the price—in the first month of the winter, that fatal winter in which I left my home to see my dear dying aunt at Marseilles. Not many times had I worn it."

"And it was perhaps in the hurry of the accident, so sudden, so *affreux*—ah! *mon Dieu!* that the cloak was thrown round the tall, dark madame; the—who then is she?"

"I lent her the cloak, Melanie. She was poor and unhappy, shivering in her thin garments on that terrible, that ill-fated day. I saw her trembling with cold. I knew her story. I pitied her, and lent her the cloak until we should reach Lyons. But we never reached it. Alas! alas! she was found dead, crushed, mangled, in the cloak which my husband easily recognised. He never doubted but that it was I. Ah, me! why did I not die too? instead of being reserved for a worse, for an infinitely more miserable fate. I had no chance of explaining—none. Perhaps I shall live and die here, and be buried as she was, in another woman's name."

Here her self-command gave way; tears coursed down the saddened, hopeless visage; that face, could it be Marguerite Gordon? "Oh, madame, my sainted martyr and penitent that you are, I see it all now!" cried the girl kneeling at her feet. "I see it all now. It's revealed to me as from Heaven. Did I not see you one cold evening throw your woollen shawl over the shoulders of that miserable Marie Magnan—she that curses you and reviles you when she is strong? And to think that I should be such an imbecile as to believe all that La Chatte said of you. Pardon me, oh! madame, I implore you on my knees!"

"Poor Melanie! you have my pardon freely. I have always loved you, my poor child, have I not?"

"Yes! and your words were like those of Madame la Supérieure, at the Convent, where they taught me when I was a little child. She was a woman straight out of Heaven, come down to earth, I believe, to help us poor sinners. And you, oh, but yes! you are another one."

"I think, Melanie, we have talked long enough. If we are seen speaking any more to-day, Manon will be angry, and that will not be good for anybody, will it?"

"La Chatte!" said the girl, getting up and stamping her feet, "I am ashamed of myself that I have not torn her cap off her head. So much I will promise myself before I am freed; and let me whisper, you shall go too. I swear it! And Alphonse shall help you."

"You must persuade him to break the law, Melanie?"

"The law?" said Melanie contemptuously. "Is he not a smuggler, a carrier of contraband goods, and if he does not aid madame, I swear on this holy symbol (here she took from her bosom an ebony crucifix, set with old gold) he shall never again kiss my lips or call me his wife in the church of St. Gudule at Olonne-sur-mer."

The winter, the long and dreary winter came to an end—with its melancholy days and dismal nights—when the miserable captive, full often (and how wearily) repeated to herself the sad refrain, "Would God it were morning!" and then "Would God it were night!" With sodden ways, with bitter blasts, with iron frosts, with death-white snowstorms the terrible season wore on. Terrible to the poor, terrible to the forlorn, terrible above all to the outcast and the forsaken in a strange land.

But the gracious spring, with bud and bloom, with glancing sunlight and benign blue sky, comes to all. It came even to the prisoners in that house of sorrow, of torment, of secret cruelty, of callous neglect and indifference. And with spring came hope.

Melanie's term of imprisonment was nearly ended. She had other conversations with Marguerite, and she had determined in that fierce Southern heart of hers to achieve the release of the English miladi, or to pay the heavy penalty she well knew would be exacted. There was no fear of her life perhaps, yet it is made very uncomfortable for people who break the law deliberately in France. She had a certain inborn timidity about that part of it; but her love and sympathy had overcome all such feeling. She had enlisted her lover Alphonse in the enterprise and also her cousin Adèle, a frolicsome girl a year or two younger than herself.

With her aid she was confident she could arrange the liberation of madame. She, Adèle, and Alphonse, like Les Trois Mousquetaires, could do anything. Nothing should be of the impossible.

In spite of her misery, Marguerite could not help smiling, as she heard the girl gravely comparing herself and her companions to the renowned trio, so little

likely to be known to an Englishwoman of her age and station.

"I am afraid you have wasted your leisure in reading unprofitable books, Melanie," said she. "You must not do anything rash, that may compromise you with the Government, for my sake."

"I am to read my breviary and tell my beads, then, these two years that I spend in this cave—this Bastille —this *hôtel des incurables! La belle affaire!* But for Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, I should have gone mad. And the Comte de Monte Cristo! That dear Château d'If! You shall escape like Edmond Dantes, I swear it! I, Melanie Delorge."

"I hope so, *ma petite;* but I must not be muffled up in a shroud though," she added sadly. "I should be swathed in grave-clothes in real earnest if I stayed here another year. Melanie, you will not fail me; you believe in me; and I will make you and Alphonse rich in the future."

"By my mother's last kiss—she who is now a saint in Paradise," said the excited girl, dropping on her knees, and gazing with tearful dark eyes up to heaven, "I will save you, madame, from this vault, this grave of the living—this *oubliette*, so infamous with this ghoul of a Manon. But do not talk of reward."

"You are a good girl, a brave girl, Melanie, and you are now all my hope upon earth."

As the southern spring advanced, the plane trees in the streets of Marseilles—those long regular lines of leafage, of which every branch springs uniform with that of its neighbour on right or left of its opposite comrade—began to fill out with bursting buds, to quiver greenly in the sun rays, to tremble to the faint warm breeze that stole along the shores of the blue Mediterranean. In spite of rules and regulations the discipline of the institution partially relaxed. Occasionally one and then another of the attendants would receive leave to visit a friend, to attend a *fête* or a saint's day, to join a procession or a first communion. Then the patients were permitted to attend to themselves, or relegated to the sole ministration of Melanie and another comparatively indulgent attendant. At

length the wished for, anxiously calculated day arrived on which hung so fearful an amount of expectation.

It was the 30th of June. Melanie's exemption was complete. At dusk her *fiancé* was to arrive. The day finished, the quarter ended; her two years' banishment, imprisonment, what you will, were over.

Alphonse and Adèle were to come to see her; with them she was to return to her home—to cast off her official trammels for ever and aye. The girl was excited, almost frenzied with the prospect of her release and the approaching enfranchisement of her poor madame, whom she came to love more and more every hour. On the first day of that very week, Dr. Daubigny had made his quarterly report as to the mental condition of the patients of the institution. Piquing himself upon the inflexibility of his decisions, he had on this occasion submitted a more carefully drawn up report than usual, in which he had referred to the case of Madame Hoche or Delacour (*dame Anglaise*), and, as an instance, of the extremely obstinate nature of the phases of mania invariably entertained by persons of that nation. In his opinion her malady was deeply rooted, hopeless, incurable. He would even suggest that she should be removed to the Salpetrière, or some other last resort where the worst cases of mania had been successfully treated. He wished to testify to the extreme care and attention invariably exhibited by the female attendant (Manon Lepage) in whose charge she was placed.

Then the Doctor departed, proudly conscious of having discharged his duty to his country, to science, to his profession, and at the same time vindicated his correct hypothesis with regard to all individuals of that mysterious and perplexing nationality, *les habitants de l'Angleterre.*

On the last day of August it so happened that La Chatte fell down the stairs and strained her ankle, an occurrence which caused Melanie to shout with laughter as soon as she could do it discreetly.

"*À la bonne heure,*" said she to Marguerite, who could not even then forbear to rebuke her for want of feeling. "We shall not have her prying and gliding about like

a serpent, poisonous reptile that she is. I must stamp on her! I must crush her!" she said, her eyes glittering, her features working, as she lifted her foot threateningly. "Yet it is as well. I might have been indiscreet. Meanwhile I must see after the treat I am to give my fellow servants."

Melanie had good-naturedly arranged a little banquet to which all the domestics of the house were bidden, and some of the inmates—partly in real kindness and sympathy for their desolate condition, and partly in the hope of securing an interval of less strict surveillance, during which the escape might be more easily effected.

Adèle and Alphonse had entered into the scheme with all the enthusiasm of their characters. Charmed at once to be of use to their friend and lover—to whom with all her faults they were most deeply attached—and full of eager sympathy for the poor madame so unjustly confined, they were willing and also in a position to render most efficient aid.

Adèle had been instructed as to the most minute details of the captive lady's appearance and apparel. She had even under a pretence of seeing Melanie visited her room and arranged the style of dress which was to be used on the occasion. With the born instinct of a Frenchwoman for intrigue she united a fine natural talent for acting. For herself she saw but little difficulty in the matter.

True, she was not so tall as madame, but she could come in high-heeled shoes, which would add to her height. She could wear a sober-looking dark dress, a shawl of marked and distinguishable pattern; also a bonnet and lace veil. *Ma foi!* she would undertake to deceive the whole college of surgeons, not to speak of half-a-dozen stupid nurses, with the only sharp one of the lot—a malediction on her!—laid up in bed.

CHAPTER X

THE fortunate day was not suffered to pass without making the *coup de théâtre* so long anticipated, so long thought out, even to its minutest details.

At an early hour in the morning Adèle was walking up stairs attired in a dark dress, held up over a bright petticoat. Her shawl was a rich Indian fabric, brought to Olonne by Melanie's sailor lover in one of his voyages. In order to assimilate herself to the captive in the manner of height, she had for that morning only put on a pair of wonderful high-heeled boots, which bestowed on her fully an added inch of stature, instead of, however, tripping lightly up stairs as was her wont singing some gay *chansonette*, expressive of disdain for everything prosaic and duteous, she stooped, with bent shoulders, and dragged herself wearily onward, clinging to the banisters as if too weak to mount without assistance.

"But what then, ails thee, Adèle?" said one of the nurses, as she encountered her on the landing nearest to the room of Melanie. "Thou resemblest *la vieille* Madame Bontemps, *ma foi!* Qu'est que c'est que ça?"

"I am at the point of death. But yes, thou say'st truly. See'st not thou that I faint with the pain? It is the rheumatism and asthma, marsh fever, what not. I perish with weakness, and my head, ah! It is all of my own folly; but it is for the last time that I shall be imprudent."

"Then thou wilt not live to prove it, *ma belle*," said the nurse grimly. "When thou ceasest to be imprudent thou wilt cease to live. But yes, *le bon* Saint Pierre will receive thee, doubtless. I make him my compliments of the acquaintance."

"And what saint will receive thee?" retorted Adèle. "Would *la Vierge* bestow so much as a thought upon thy dried up bag of bones? But no! Thou wilt be kept cleaning the pots and pans as thou dost here—ha! ha!—in the *basse cour* of Paradise, *vraiment!*"

"Thou wilt return from the unseen, then, thou: is it not so?" said the nurse, sourly patient, "that is, if

thou art not *passablement grillée*. Ah! wouldst thou?" This she said as Adèle made one step towards her, her black eyes blazing with wrath, but with a groan, apparently of pain, she limped forward to the upper flight of steps and toiled painfully upward.

"I committed sin in replying to the child," thought the nurse—"she is manifestly ill, fever-stricken, if she be not sick unto death, who shall say, since Rosine was cut off in her bloom? I have perhaps hastened the end. *Mon Dieu!* I will not trouble her more. How angry she was! What a flash in her eyes! Let her wait till La Chatte recovers, that is all."

So the nurse, an honest dull-souled drudge, renowned for her industry, in consequence for which she was permitted to do twice as much work as any of the other attendants, passed down stairs to the monotonous but necessary duties to which Adèle had scornfully referred.

In half-an-hour Adèle returned, walking down the stairs nearly as lamely and languidly as she had ascended. She only encountered the same nurse at the hall, to whom she muttered about her head throbbing so much that she could not remain longer. Her face was indeed muffled up, her voice being in consequence rather indistinct. The nurse gave her a wide berth this time, and perceiving her to open the outer gate of the courtyard and disappear through it, gave an exclamation of relief.

"It is hard to be troubled with evil tempers and selfishness among the servants of the institution. But as to strangers actually departing, it is of an insolence the most superb; though it may well be that it will not happen again."

Nor did it.

Once outside the walls of her Bastille, the freed Marguerite—for it was she in truth, attired in the easily recognisable apparel of Adèle—walked hurriedly in the direction indicated to her, where the cottage of Alphonse stood.

Adèle was lying on Marguerite's bed, dressed in the patient's clothes, at this moment screaming with laughter as she repeated her conversation with her

nurse, and then springing on to the floor, imitated her own feeble staggering gait.

"*Ma foi! Melanie, qu'en dis tu?* Am I not a born actress? Shall I not rather go on the stage to roll in riches at the end of my first season? Fancy the excitement, the triumphs—cartloads of bouquets, bushels of bracelets, diamond rings *à discretion*, the noble and the rich fighting for a glance of the eye or a few kind words from *la petite* Adèle. My resolution is formed. I run away next week to seize upon a manager at once."

"Poor little lamb!" said Melanie, patting the girl's dark curls affectionately. "There are wolves in that forest. How soon would they eat thee up, leaving nothing but this *belle chevelure?* How do I know? Perhaps I hear things. I did not myself live in Lyons for a whole month and keep my eyes open for nothing. But thou hast done well, and *le bon Dieu* will recompense us all for this day's work ere we die. Doubt it not. I wonder if Gustave's boat will sail to-morrow night?"

Before the time when the patients were locked up for the night, Adèle and Melanie managed to get clear of the establishment; it was not until rather a late hour that the news reached the higher authorities that Madame l'Anglaise had disappeared. Melanie and her cousin were subjected to a rigid quasi-legal examination during the next week. They adhered, however, to a negative and cautious style of defence. Nothing grave could be elicited, so after a decent interval the matter was hushed up. The occurrence was considered to reflect generally upon the management of the institution, and for that reason, as chiefly happens in France, was not obtruded upon the public. Alphonse and Melanie were in their way persons of consideration. During the Empire nothing was to be gained by arousing the ire of the fisher families, not too scrupulous about means of retaliation, and sufficiently powerful in their way to direct popular feeling at elections. La Chatte made moan after the manner of her kind over an escaped victim, too distant again to feel claw or tooth. Doctor Daubigny was fully confirmed in his theory as to the

ineradicable lunacy of all the inhabitants of perfidious Albion, young or old, male or female, rich or poor.

Marguerite was enabled, out of her purse, and by the sale of a few ornaments which she had managed to secrete, to pay necessary expenses, and even to make some small recompense to her kind deliverers, loath as they were to receive remuneration. To Melanie and Adèle she gave each a ring, such as the latter had scarcely imagined herself possessing in her wildest dreams of the stage. Upon Alphonse, when they parted on the deck of a fishing smack—not wholly innocent of brandy kegs, which the exciseman was rarely fated to examine—she pressed a wedding gift of more than ordinary value, and thanking him with tears in her eyes, promised to write to Melanie and inform her of her future proceedings.

"Tell her she is to be a *bonne enfant*, Alphonse," she said with the last words struggling through her sobs; "and when her temper rises to think of her friend Madame Marguerite, as she called me; to heed my counsels, and to kneel in prayer."

"Madame has been the good angel of Melanie," replied the hardy sailor, with a look of respectful gratitude in his bold eyes; "it is to her that I owe my present happiness. Madame will sometimes think of us in her château d'Angleterre, and we will pray for her—*la petite* and I—now and always."

. . . . . .

When Marguerite Gordon turned her faltering steps towards the cheaply furnished room which now represented her home, the direst conflict tortured her every nerve which has power to rend the human heart. She had returned—from sorrow and misery, from unmerited misfortune, from captivity, almost indeed from the grave—and for what?

Better had she lain there, motionless, mutilated, for evermore, like her luckless travelling companion. But she, at least, was dead to all human woe, to all agony of suffering.

Far better had she never returned to this terrible life in her own land, her own home, once so sweet, so precious in daily gladness. All was now so sadly, so

fatally changed. All had been so quickly forgotten, so prompt to "let the dead past bury its dead."

How hard, how bitter it was! She had fought bravely, steadfastly, against weakness of mind and body, against hope deferred and sickness of heart, against the crushing forces of ignorance, and the inscrutably cruel injustice of Fate. She had triumphed by patient strength of will, by calm consideration of chances, by brave unflinching courage, and now to what end?

She was changed and worn, she was haggard of aspect, apparently beyond restoration or recall. That her glass, nay, her heart told her. But with the kindly reparation of household comfort, of rest and leisure, of welcome, affection, love!—oh, love! the Healer, the Restorer, the great Physician—would some of the old charm linger around the ruined fane? That nameless grace, that mystic beauty, which Hugh Gordon in the divine season of their early wedded life had found so precious, so enthralling, had fled. But was not the glance of the eye still softly bright? The tone of her voice still low and sweet? and oh! God in Heaven, more than all, was not the heart's freshness unchanged? That passionate, well-nigh uncontrollable desire, welded into the recesses of her being, to cast herself upon her husband's neck and swoon out her life in his sheltering arms, was it not as wildly sweet, strong, soul- and sense-pervading as ever?

But as this miserable woman reeled and staggered on the path which she resolutely compelled herself to take, away from the lost household joys and the sacred altar on which the treasure of her youthful life had been offered up, from all the awakened Lares which cried aloud from the recovered hearth, one thought arose, clear and brightly lambent, from the ashes of her ruined life.

Whatever had happened had been the will of God. She had been thought to be dead, mourned deeply, sincerely, if not for aye, and what had come to pass? Hugh Gordon had again married, another held that place at board and bed in his house, in his heart, which once was hers—hers only; that woman was of her own

near kindred; she had approved herself capable of ministering to his comfort, of ruling his household, of insuring his happiness. Oh, short-lived, darksome flower of grief! How soon had thy sombre petals been irradiated by a newer, fresher spirit light.

Bitter and wild, her eager prayer to die, passionate and despairing her arraignment of the justice of Heaven, yet she could not but admit that the household was brightened by the calm light of gentle but unquestioned authority. Were not her children safe, well tended, lovingly cherished, happy? Her noble fearless boy, with her own dark eyes and steadfast bearing, her gentle soft-voiced Rita, her father's favourite. Were they not passionately fond of the pure-souled woman, who so gently, so faithfully acted the mother's part? And he, the bereaved husband, who had wept, as she had been truly told, as one without hope, over her suppositious grave, whose saddened face and drooping form had inspired strangers and friends alike with the conviction that his heart lay buried in the grave where her body was so hastily assumed to have been placed. How was it with him? Still was there the trace of thoughts too bitter and dreadful to be ever effaced, yet had not a calmly happy, not merely resigned, expression taken the place of that of unending woe upon his corrugated brow?

Could it be doubted but that she loved him—that stranger—deeply, fondly, engrossingly? But how hard, how false, how mean to think thus of Mariana, no stranger, her own cousin, whom she had so loved and trusted in the old day! Had she not done her fullest duty as a wife to him; of mother to the lost darlings of her soul? Was she not peacefully contented, helpful in the home that would have been so lonely, so uninhabitable but for her? Yes! this last drop of bitterness was more corroding than all that had dripped on her bleeding heart before. She could not hate her; no, nor condemn *him*.

Long and earnestly did Marguerite pray on that memorable eve, casting herself prone upon the floor of her humble apartment, writhing and shuddering ever and anon, like one possessed with a demon, in the

pangs of her great agony. How hard it was to renounce the crown and glory of her life, the sweetness of her love, the pride of her position as wife, the passionate maternal affection intertwined with her very heartstrings.

Again and again was she on the point of rushing frantically into the presence of him who had forgotten her love, and extinguished, so to speak, her memory. She would call upon her—the new wife—hateful word—to renounce the title she had usurped, the love she had stolen, the position she had wrongfully enjoyed.

Where would be the hardship? Had not this cousin, the soft-voiced, fair-seeming Mariana, been all too eager to accept a heart that was vowed to a buried love, a life that for the first years of bereavement should in decency have been devoted to the lost goddess of his soul, to her whose unexampled misfortune should have secured a more extended interval of patient grief or mournful resignation.

What wrongs, what sorrows, had been hers! Why should not others have their share in the world's miseries? Let the usurper go forth, mother and babe! who was there to say that the true wife should be withstood in demanding her sacred inalienable rights?

And yet how hard it was—unjust, merciless, evil in thought and act, in spite of nature's unregenerate promptings! And who was she to doom to life-long unhappiness at least one inoffensive, fair-souled creature, to damage irrevocably the career of the innocent child—his child, as well as that of the supplanter; and for all she knew, displease and wound, permanently alienate him, her own husband, still fondly loved, though alas! pillowed on the breast and clasped in the arms of another? What agony was in either division of the thought?

And why should she do all this? Why should she come ghoul-like from the grave, wherein all her kin believed her to be lying, to ruin the peace, to wreck the happiness, to change the whole earthly career of this calmly happy, lawful household? They would lose all that makes life happy. She would gain perhaps

nothing that could in any wise repay her for the agony of the past—for the despair of the future.

She pictured to herself the mute anguish of the unhappy Mariana. Her sensitive, modest nature she knew well. Could she survive the proved dishonour of her life since the mockery of marriage vows, the stain upon her child's birthright, the lifelong indignity which would be felt though not inflicted? The grief of the aged mother, the least suspicious, least condoning, least compromising of God's creatures? All this woe she would surely work, if she stood upon her rights and selfishly, remorselessly, refused to yield to mercy and the pleading of circumstance.

Then her husband, her darling Hugh! What would be his state of mind! At first she judged him truly, she knew the flash of joy and surprise that would light up his melancholy eyes. How well she knew by heart the smile that would illumine that thoughtful brow as he realised the fact of his true wife's return from the dead!

But would the brow remain unclouded? Would he not behold the reverse of the picture? Would his gaze not rest upon a weeping woman who had never failed in tenderest love, in earnest duty and obedience to him; in loving service towards his children, dearer to him than aught else on earth? Would he see unmoved that sweet face, white with fear and sorrow, the bright hair dishevelled, the sobs, the cries, the groans of one from whom all earthly hope had fled?

And then—alas! that it should be so—did she not believe that from her pale face and altered form all feminine charm had fled for ever? How could any man associate love and rapture with the sad relics of her face and form?

Could she endure, could she survive, the involuntary glance of cold assent with which her husband might regard her; the instinctive relief with which he might turn lovingly, pityingly, to the fairer creature that had so lately been added to his household and possessions?

If she but made the plunge, careless of what misery to each might befall, her defeat might be crushing and irrevocable, while she would have forgone the

consciousness of a life's sacrifice for those she loved best on earth—the conviction of having secured their happiness at the cost of her own. No! rather the Cross—the Crown of thorns—though her heart's blood welled freshly forth at every step. Happiness? Idle word! It was her life-blood, the vital breath, the soul's essence; for with home, husband, children gone, what had existence to offer?

Yes, direful as was the wrench that strained, well nigh tore out her very heart-strings, it should be done, she told herself as she rose feebly from her knees and gazed piteously around the narrow chamber, as if for visible aid in her sore spiritual need. Had not woman, in the old heroic days of which she had loved to read in her happy youth, done as much for husband and children—ay, for lover and friend? Was she degenerate, and should the dictates of a holier, a loftier faith, have no chronicle of the might of woman's love, pure as the floweret's breath, strong as death's clasp, and constant to the remotest realms of the unknown land?

Yes, her vow was taken, the oath was irrevocably sworn. Not yet, not yet would the sacrifice be completed. Years might pass before the worn frame, the inly bleeding heart, sank before the dread yet welcome summons.

Yet none the less surely did Marguerite Gordon know in that hour that with her own hands she was digging the grave wherein her self-slain love should lie deep and voiceless till at the trumpet of the Archangel it should arise in radiant life.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN the last piteous resolve is taken, when hope has fled never to return, when the worst has befallen, the demons of doubt and fear have no longer power to torture the supremely agonised soul. Then commences

a period of torpor which is akin to repose, a partial insensibility to outward influences, a dull despair which acts as a shield against acute misery.

For many days after her fateful resolve, Marguerite Gordon mechanically fulfilled the duties which she had mapped out. She compelled herself to perform the part in life which she had elected to take henceforth.

In the mornings she laboured sedulously at the rare and delicate department of needlework, by which she had, on reflection, deemed it possible that she could gain a livelihood. Twice a week she dragged her feeble form to the house of Madame Faucher, with whom she had by this time established a sort of intimacy. The Frenchwoman was as kind as her busy life permitted her to be, and though not given to the deeper emotions really felt compassionately towards la Malheureuse, who spoke French with so perfect an accent, who had been *affreusement blessée, mon Dieu!* whose work was so exquisite, whose manner was so worthy of the Faubourg St. Germain, yet whose secret she had never been able to divine. Madame, however, lived so completely in an atmosphere of plot, mystery, exile, and conspiracy, she had so many friends and customers who were far other than they seemed, that she could not afford to lose time in unravelling the tangled hanks of any one's secret history, however interesting.

So she accepted the frail invalid whom Fate had apparently pursued with so unrelenting a purpose, and did what she could amongst her many acquaintances to find sale for such trifles of embroidery and lacework as sufficed to pay for her humble apartment and slender fare.

When the demand and supply became more equalised, a nearer approach to peace and satisfaction commenced to manifest itself in that humble abode. The regular work, unremitting and laborious though it might be, exercised a sedative influence and lulled temporarily the pangs of passionate regret. She also arranged for giving lessons in French and Italian. This supplied the element of variety. Her pupils were occasionally sympathetic. Their unspoken pity soothed her spirit,

and day by day the great healer, Time, touched with his precious balm the still sore and shrinking wound which so long resisted all other medicaments.

During this period of probation Marguerite had been steadfastly preparing herself to carry out a fixed idea. Gradually she hoped to acquire nerve to dress, act, to look the character which all her remaining hope and energy were taxed to represent. She practised a new manner, a changed accent, an altered appearance, so that she might be perfect in the guise of a teacher of foreign languages—so that she might pass muster without suspicion. Where? In her own future home! Before the face of her husband and his wife. That she might look into the eyes of her children—the darlings of her heart, the jewels of her past, dead life—and yet be neither recognised nor suspected.

For weeks and months (how little had she to think of else?) she carried out this purpose unflinchingly. She grew to be fully accustomed to be addressed as Madame Latour, to write herself Marie Louise Latour, in a hundred ways to stamp her suppositious personal attributes indelibly on her mind and manner.

It was generally taken for granted that she belonged to the class of Englishwomen who have made an unprosperous marriage with a foreigner. "The best women seem to be the most easily taken in in that way, my dear," said Mrs. Berenger, her chief patroness, to a friend.

"She is too sorrowful to be asked about herself; he may be in the galleys for all we know; but such a thorough lady and such an accent I never got for my girls for double the money. I must try to recommend her about among my friends a little more; it is a shame she should have an hour unemployed."

Mrs. Berenger did not visit Mrs. Hugh Gordon, but one of the friends to whom she introduced her prize teacher did. She, it seems, was expressing her unbounded admiration coupled with self-gratulation at the reasonable rate of her charges, when Mrs. Gordon, who was present, thus spoke:

"I wish I could secure a person of that sort for my Rita. Mr. Gordon is so fastidious about accent,

and the poor child, though fairly taught in other branches, is backward in languages. Do give me her address, and I'll call upon her."

"Not the least necessity for that, my dear; the poor thing will be delighted to come to you. Not that she can walk much; but you can offer to pay for her cab. Besides I don't know where she lives; some up stairs den these foreign people always seem to have—not that, I'm sure, she's one herself, though her accent is rather foreign, from having lived so long in France. In Florence, too, she spent a couple of winters. I suspect her husband was, or is, a bit of a *mauvais sujet*, not that she ever speaks of him or of herself; and though she's so mild and sad, she's not the woman you'd care to cross-examine."

"Poor thing! what a melancholy existence!" said the soft-hearted Mariana. "Her husband dead or absent, no children to fill her heart, and reduced to teaching for a livelihood. Didn't you say she couldn't walk well?"

"Yes, rather lame, and has received other injuries—she is almost disfigured. Only she is so awfully nice, she would never be painful to look at. Well, my dear, I must be off. We can't help these things. If there were no unfortunate people there would be no good teachers—ladies, I mean. The other people I can't bear. I'll tell Madame Latour to come and see you on Monday next."

The well-meaning, light-hearted butterfly of fashion was as good as her word. She found her "treasure" at her own house, and told her with great glee and satisfaction that she had recommended her to a great friend of hers—the dearest, sweetest woman in the world, who was married to one of the most distinguished, talented men she knew, and had a sweet little daughter whose French and Italian had been infamously neglected, and she must not fail to go on Monday next. She would not forget the name—Mrs. Gordon—would she? A medieval-looking house, Hampstead way, with a great wall round it, and steps, and a peculiar portico, and old-fashioned gate. Madame had better write it down—Mrs. Hugh Gordon.

She was running on at her customary rapid rate, thinking much more of herself than her listener, as usual, and quite charmed with herself for her charitable intentions, when the ashen face and piteous, despairing look warned her that something was wrong.

"What is the matter? Whatever have I done? Lean on me. Sit down on the sofa till you are better. Oh! I see you have been teaching Adeline too long, and have knocked yourself up, as you always do. Adeline, ring the bell for Waters: quick—a glass of port wine for madame and another for me, I declare I shall faint myself. The dreadful weather is too exhausting. You feel better now, don't you?"

"Much better, thank you. Pray do not alarm yourself. I am subject to attacks of faintness, and I have had an unusually long day. Pray don't concern yourself about me."

This she compelled herself to say—every word forced from her, while heart and brain seemed benumbed first, and then wildly whirling to madness or oblivion. She found strength to say before the interview terminated, in measured tones, and with oh! so pitiful an attempt at a smile, *that she would be sure to remember the name.*

CHAPTER XII

FORTUNATELY for Madame Latour, Hugh Gordon did not join them at lunch; she was, therefore, enabled to make trial of the value of her disguise, of the texture of her moral mask, before submitting them to a keener inquisition, a more dangerous test. As it was, after the first passing qualms, she felt comparatively at ease. The sympathetic, unsuspecting nature of Mariana, made the task of innocent deception less difficult. With instinctive delicacy, she turned the conversation, fearing that reference to the railway disasters might have revived the memory of misfortune in the mind of madame. Alas! and was it not so? She insisted

upon her taking a glass of wine, of the wonderful old port, upon which Hugh Gordon, himself the most abstemious of men, yet prided himself. She tempted her with unaccustomed dainties; she made the children say a short lesson in her presence, and would not hear of any formal commencement for a day or two till madame should be stronger.

"I want you to be at home here," she said, "to look upon us as your friends, your relations, if you like. I am sure the children will love you dearly, your manner is so different from any other instructress I have seen. I do so wish my husband had been here to-day; but you will meet him soon; you must know him, and he speaks French so beautifully besides." On the first day the lessons were thus got over somehow. It was hard, very hard, to repeat the words of the foreign, yet familiar, speech to her own children; to mark the slightly inattentive or half indifferent eye of the learner, quick as all children are, of whatever age, to mark the social difference of the paid teacher, however refined in manner and appearance, and the mistress of the house. From this vulgarity of feeling, however, the little Rita was more free than ordinary children. High-minded and generous by nature, she had been early taught to respect her elders, and to obey unquestioningly the commands of those set in authority over her. Mariana was watchful to suppress the least sign of insubordination; but the mild gravity and unwearied patience of her instructress were of themselves sufficient to attract the affection of any healthy-minded child. In this interval of tuition she exerted herself to amuse even more than to interest. Very soon both Rita and Alister were loud in their praises of "madame," as they elected to call her, and impatient of any break in her ministrations.

As it chanced, an unforeseen matter of business prevented Hugh Gordon from returning as he expected; weeks indeed passed away before his absence came to an end.

"He is returning to-day," said Mariana, all gleefully. "I shall be so glad for him to make your acquaintance. I have told him in my letters what a comfort you have

been to us all. Really, I don't know what we should have done without you. Will you stay and dine with us this evening? I will send you home in the carriage. I should so like you to meet my dearest husband."

Mariana had turned, when she concluded her sentence, to look up some indispensable needle necessaries. The two women had been working and talking together, during the morning hours, when she heard a sound as if of catching breath. With sudden fear she looked over, and saw that madame had risen, and was gazing through the window into the garden. When she moved back into sight her face was set and fixed in expression. The same hardness which Mariana had before noticed, was set like a seal upon her countenance.

Her eyes, too, had lost their usual expression, and had the far-off look of one who sees at a distance an object not visible to the rest of the bystanders.

"I deeply regret I shall not be able to come," she said slowly and monotonously; "though—I should—have liked—much—to have—met—Mr. Gordon. This is going to be one of my bad days; you will therefore pardon me if I do not attend to-morrow. It will be better for me to retire at once, lest I become worse. You will make my excuses to Mr. Gordon?"

"Poor thing!" said the kind-hearted Mariana, after she had in every way made easy the departure of madame. "I can't quite make out her ailment. It must be heart disease, or something of that sort. One moment she is perfectly well—I never saw her better than she was this morning—and the next moment she seems hardly able to speak or stand, and that dreadful expression of inward pain comes over her face. It must be heart complaint. We must try and get Dr. Astley to see her. He might give her a strengthening draught. It's curious, too, that something always comes in the way of Hugh knowing her. How pleased he would be to talk about the Continent with her."

Marguerite had schooled herself sternly to bear all shocks and surprises which might assail her in this new world of sorrow, among the briars of which she had elected to dwell. But for the moment this seemed a fresh torture—a novel arrangement of the rack in

anticipation of which her worn spirit shrank and trembled. She had therefore begged for a reprieve. She felt it necessary in order to summon all her powers of endurance in preparation for the operation.

Great and merciful God! was she to sit by and see the love-light in Hugh Gordon's eyes shed upon the eagerly responsive countenance of another woman? To note the frank welcome, the unconcealed joy with which the happy wife greets the returning husband in all households glorified by wedded love; to hear the thousand and one questions asked and answered about the sacred trivialities which form the bond of home life; to hear the chronicles of childish intelligence unfolded; to note both parents stooping over the cot where lay the sleeping infant, in whose veins ran their mingled blood, from all property in which she had been excluded. Could she see all this and live? No; rather let her perish by her own hand, if she was too weak to fly the scene of dangerous indulgence, of maddening regret.

How that night passed she never knew! Stupor and racking pain of brow, deathlike despondency, abysmal despair, absorbed each faculty alike of mind and body. Gradually, then, the mists cleared from her mental vision; darksome clouds rolled away from the summit of the mountains. After long and earnest pleading with her God, she saw the cross brought suddenly before her tear-stained eyes. That pallid, blood-stained brow, thorn encircled; those eyes of such wondrous sadness, sweetness, strength; were they not there, while ever and anon were not the death-like lineaments lit up with the eternal splendour of celestial hope? What were her sorrows to these? Have not other weak souls borne that cross? and what was hers? All those she loved on earth were happy—only too happy. That, then, was her selfish grief. Was it not for herself, her individual sorrow that she was wailing as one that refused to be comforted? Not even as "Rachel weeping for her children because they are not," could she refuse to be comforted. Her duty was plain, though the flesh cried aloud "Curse God, and die," as to the sorely tempted Patriarch. Unless she was to prove renegade to the teachings of her youth, to the purpose

of her life, to the faith of her ancestors, to her Saviour and her God. No! not for any earthly temptation, in the shape of pain or pleasure, could she so decide. Henceforth she would renounce self in every form and shape, would crucify the flesh. Enrolled in the ranks of those who endured hardness and a long fight of afflictions, her spirit, heaven-supported, would bear this endless weeping night of earth, in preparation for the dawn of eternal day.

With calmer thoughts came the conviction that there were but two courses before her, in the arrangement of her future fragment of life. If she yielded to the natural repugnance which she could not avoid, the shuddering dislike which any woman could not but feel to her heart's core at the sight of her husband, so to speak, in the possession of a rival, it was free to her to do so. But she must then elect to see his face no more, to be separated for the remainder of her sad life from her children. And what would that life be then? Would she not drift downwards into utter oblivion, nothingness, indifference? would she not lose her love on earth, her faith in heaven?

No! rather let her perish in the light. Some bitter pangs of grief and deadly stabs might her heart know; but there would be a gleam of sunshine as she listened to the fresh voices of her children, felt their arms around her neck, revelled in the caresses which their newly formed affections impelled them to shower upon their dear, kind, amusing, sweet-voiced madame.

The die was cast. The morning saw her carefully dressed. Having prayed long and earnestly, she armed herself (so to speak) for the encounter.

At the exact hour at which her duties commenced, she attended, and assumed an air of comparative freedom from pain, and improved spirits, as she greeted Mariana, who was charmed to note her altered mien.

"The change of weather must have something to do with it," she said, unsuspectingly. "The last day or two has been quite balmy and spring-like. I am so glad that you are able to come, for my husband has made a point of returning to lunch to-day. He said he had missed you so often that he should regard it

as a bad omen if you did not make each other's acquaintance soon."

"I cannot think it would make any difference to Mr. Gordon if he never met me," she answered, even now finding it difficult to quell altogether the rising tinge of bitterness. "But I must thank him for his great kindness; teachers so seldom meet with much of that commodity."

"My husband, I think you will say," said Mariana, with matronly pride, "is different from most people in that respect. He never seems to care what position people hold, more particularly women. But you must judge for yourself."

"I make no doubt that he is everything that is of the most *respectueux*, the most distinguished," groaned Marguerite, taking refuge in her most French idiom and accent. "But yes, it is he that Madame Faucher has so often raved to me as of *un homme merveilleux*."

"That he is, indeed," assented Mariana, with all the benevolence restored to her placid countenance. "I often wonder what I have done to be worthy of such a heart."

"And I to be adjudged unworthy—condemned; ay, executed," said Marguerite, in her heart's inmost cell. "Did I not die then, when I was told my home was no longer mine, nor my husband's heart, nor my children's love! But bear up, oh bleeding heart! I have resolved on my course. Heaven grant me strength to pursue it unfalteringly."

With her outward voice she but said, "Heaven's decrees are mysterious, but, my dearest Madame Gordon, no one will question your claim to the happiest of homes—the best of men, you who have proved by your loving tenderness to his children, your unselfish regard to duty, that you so richly deserve both."

"Every one is better to me than I deserve," said Mariana. "My mother always spoiled me, and my darling dead cousin, Marguerite. Oh! if you could but have known her; she was a woman you would have delighted in. Then after her death comes poor Hugh, who has never let the wind blow roughly on me, or said an unkind word in my hearing; and, last

of all, my dear madame, you are joining in the conspiracy. I shall begin to develop the pride which goes before a fall, I'm afraid. But it is quite time to order lunch, and, in good time, here comes my husband to speak for himself."

Had she not run with girlish eagerness to the door, she would have noticed that her guest turned pale, and sank down, rather than sat, on the nearest couch.

There was a slight delay in the passage, and a few low tones, before Mr. Gordon advanced into the room, with his wife still clinging to his arm. As he came forward the foreign teacher rose, and looked with a pale but steadfast face upon the pair.

Hugh Gordon gazed for a moment fixedly at the pale, dark-robed woman who stood before him, and then said, "I have such real pleasure, Madame Latour, in thus making your acquaintance. I have heard I do not know what romances from our friend, Madame Faucher, and anticipate quite a recovery of my Parisian accent and reminiscences. I am grieved to hear that you have been ill."

"I have been ill—truly ill," said the teacher, in wavering tones, which she in vain strove to steady, "but I hope to recover, and gain strength shortly. Madame Gordon has been so truly kind to me, that from gratitude alone I must make haste to get well."

"And Rita, my little Rita," said he, "what do you think of her ear? I should be miserable if I thought she was not capable of mastering all the *nuances* of the language."

"Make yourself easy, monsieur," said she, insensibly gliding into the language referred to. "Mademoiselle Rita has from nature the memory and the delicacy of ear without which no study can impart a perfect pronunciation."

"She inherits both," answered Mr. Gordon. "Her mother's daughter could scarcely be as other children in that respect; indeed in any other. Ah, me! but you will excuse my anxiety, I know, Madame Latour, accent is a very serious matter. But I feel perfectly at ease now that she will be in future under your tuition. My

expectations, which were great, have been more than fulfilled."

The teacher bowed, and turned away her head, as Mr. Gordon looked lovingly into his wife's kind eyes, and retreated with her into his dressing-room.

That first repast in his house—in her house, as she told herself—was it not a wondrous mixture of pleasure and pain, joy in that her heart's every pulse sprang into fresh and living energy, at the sight of the face long lost, long loved, that had been as a Christ-picture to her in the wearisome sick bed dreams, in her doleful captivity. And the grief was unutterable, in that she had bound herself never again to kiss that brow so fondly loved, to clasp her arms around his neck, or to pillow her head upon the broad breast which to her had been the symbol of all manly love, of God-like strength and tenderness. And had the few fleeting years, the iron hand of pain, the magic touch of sorrow, so changed her that to him she was as a creature unknown, uncared for save as a forlorn stranger, utilised for the benefit of the children, and kindly treated merely from the habitual softness of his nature—how well she knew it—towards every phase of womanhood. Ah! me, it was even so."

Her gaze woke no responsive memory, as she timidly fixed her eyes, now restored to a far off similitude to those with which the Marguerite Gordon of old had been wont to startle and persuade. Her accents, listened to with courteous attention, fell on his ear with merely conventional interest; her interchange of playful question or answer with the children gratified without arousing memory. Strange was it that no subtle message should have passed along the life chords of either soul? Yet it was so; no echo from the grace of buried love, no semitone from memory's harp had power to disturb the decree which Fate had uttered and human law had sanctioned. Her doom of widowhood was fixed and unalterable.

With patient steadfast brow, and heartsickness almost unto death, Marguerite Gordon made final renunciation of the light of her eyes, the joy of her soul; all the brightness and colour of the life

which yet remained to her upon this melancholy earth.

"I am delighted with your new friend and teacher," said Hugh Gordon to his wife that evening. "She is even more than you said. There is such an air of refinement about her, so much grace of manner and movement, in spite of the wretched health, that I can't help admiring her. She has a few ways that remind me of some one too, I can't recollect of whom, just now."

That day—that ever-memorable day, once over, the impersonation of another individualism became comparatively easy to Marguerite Gordon. Hers was one of those natures which knows no turning back, after reason and truth have had their hearing in the court of conscience. Her vigorous intellect had sufficed to place all the circumstances of the case, all evidence before her, ere she decided and pronounced sentence —sentence of exile, sentence of death—moral, if not physical—against herself. It was hard to undergo. Trembling on the brink of deathly-weariness was often that mourning heart, long ere the self-imposed task was over. But feeble as is the flesh when rent and torn from every spiritual support, in the dread tempest of passion, which ever and anon rages within the human heart, Marguerite Gordon yet found strength to cling to the cross which she had elected to bear, though staggering oft and feeble of step, to arise strengthened and exalted from each conflict.

Within the Gordon household she became accepted as the dearest friend and trusted ally of the family. Her duties of instructress were almost entirely sunk in those of the confidential personage, who was so loving—dear to the children—so experienced an adviser, so tender a nurse in illness, so truly acceptable at all times and seasons to the whole household.

"It is the most remarkable thing," said Mariana to her one day, as they were sitting together after an illness which had gone hard with the younger woman. "One would have thought you had known us all before, Hugh says, you have so completely fallen into all our ways. When dear baby was ill, Hugh says he does not know what we should all have done without

you. I was so weak, too, that the doctor says it would have killed me to have undertaken any anxious work. I was delirious, I know, often, which he said was a bad sign."

"To you and yours, I owe love and tenderness to my life's end, and even afterwards—if we can re-visit the scenes we loved on earth. You have given me a home—a home in your hearts—is it not so? Where are the other people in this cold England of yours who would have acted thus to a *gouvernante?*"

"Many, many would, if they had only known you as well as we do. It is we who have so much to thank you for, more than we can ever repay. I know poor Hugh thinks you saved my life as well as the baby's, by your nursing and knowing what to do when the doctor could not come, and the servants were terrified and useless. You have been the dearest creature; except poor mother and my cousin Marguerite. I never loved any human creature so much." And here the grateful Mariana took the thin hands of her friend into hers and kissed them with a child's instinctive fondness.

"It is too much, my dearest, my darling," sobbed out the elder woman, as she hid her face upon the couch. "You are too good, and make a wonder of a little ordinary nursing and attention. But now you are better, and those fair cheeks are finding their roses, you must let me go home to my own den for a few days. I am perhaps a little fatigued; I am so frail a creature now. Now; ah, heaven! Yes, let me kiss you once again. Pray for me in your innocent prayers, and let your husband pray too that God will give me strength. Now for a time, adieu."

"Poor madame," thought Mariana to herself, when her tireless nurse and wise attendant had gone. "What sorrows must have been hers! I wonder if it is connected with her husband. She is an angel of patience, and so religious too. What should I have done without her. I wish she would come and live with us altogether, and not go back to that wretched little lodging of hers."

But this adherence to her own small home, in spite of the repeated invitations of Mariana and her husband

to take up her abode with them entirely, was, as it seemed to her friends, one of the peculiarities for which they were unable to account.

She certainly never objected to remain with the children, when Hugh Gordon and his wife wished to take a brief holiday together, free from the anxiety and encumbrance of baby and nurse. They were thus always assured that the children were well cared for, and the servants, who, wonderful to relate, never questioned her authority—properly supervised. But, the short period of residence over, madame always mildly but unswervingly decided to return, even were it but for a night, to her own lodging.

CHAPTER XIII

In Hugh Gordon's well-ordered home, the calm uneventful days glided smoothly on. The wounds of the heart, like those of the external frame, become cicatrised. The old undying pain throbs fiercely at intervals. Still, in accordance with this strangely compounded nature of ours, the sharpness of woe abates; the paroxysms of the tortured spirit are lulled by that ancientest anodyne, —even Time. "Why comes not death to those that mourn?" He recks not of our wild summons, of our "eager prayer to die." With the lengthening chain of years the captive's voice grows faint. We become habituated to prison wall and prison fare.

Grief slays but the young, mutinously rebellious; or the aged, already sentenced, and prone before the bolt of doom strikes them. So in the case of Marguerite Gordon—a serene and chastened resignation had supervened upon the first emotion of uncontrolled grief and spiritual rebellion. Much had been taken from her, but things precious were still left. Daily she saw the face of the man whom only, on the earth, she had loved, had ever loved. And her children, compounded from her own flesh, her very life blood—were they not in all

their lives before her, secure in this happy home, and shielded from every breath of evil. Did they not love her too, fervently, deeply? and oh! joy of joys, she had never been prevented from addressing them in endearing tones, from receiving their caresses, the pure, warm, uncalculating love-symbols of childhood.

Her former life had unconsciously been but a service of devotion to their best welfare. Now she had her reward in feeling that the portion of selfish gratification, which was dissevered and cast off for ever, was far smaller and less burdensome than it might have been.

It so happened that at the time when she made the unsuccessful attempt to enter her former home the family had but just returned from the annual visit which Hugh Gordon made to his first wife's tomb.

This observance had to him a strange admixture of pain and satisfaction. Lacerated afresh in every wound, torn and bleeding with the recurrent memory, he yet loved to think that she looked from her place on high and saw him again bedew her grave with tears; again groan out his despair, tell of all his unending grief, solaced and assuaged in part as it had been; again vow beneath the solemn stars that he had been faithful in heart to her memory—that if she had lived there would have been for him now, as in the former time, but one woman in the world. On that day he cried aloud to her beautiful spirit to look down upon the children of their love, to mark their flowerlike growth and mental fragrance as all that she could have wished. He implored her to hover near them as their guardian angel, amid the dangers and trials of mortal life.

As the anniversary of his great sorrow drew near, a shadow seemed to fall upon Hugh Gordon's spirit, never perhaps joyous, yet still cheerful with the serenity of a well regulated mind in a life environed by safety and honour. As in those periodical celebrations of the church when the dread pageant of the Divine Passion is revived, and all Christendom recalls with reverential solemnity the Great Sacrifice so precious to mankind, so in that house all things that savoured of the world's frivolities were put away. Mariana explained the

reasons which actuated her husband and the seclusion which was enforced in the household.

"Many people, I know, think it carrying matters to an unwise extreme," she said, "but Hugh, poor fellow, feels so deeply on the subject, and, as in all other matters, I cheerfully yield to his desire."

"He has often said," she continued, "that he thinks it too dreadful, so unfeeling a thing, that because a few years have elapsed since the laying in the grave of a husband or a wife, all recollection of them, all overt respect to their memory, should be suffered to pass away. If it be a sorrowful interruption to the pleasantness of life for a season, why should it not be kept up? If any of us died suddenly could we bear to think that in a few short years we should be as if we had never been, and our children should be suffered to forget almost the very names of those of whom they were never reminded by word or act? Hugh also believes that the spirits of the just, of those who have gone before, are permitted for a season to be near us, and that they retain the power of being grieved or gratified by the actions of those left on earth. There is something sweet about the thought when held in a reverential spirit; is there not?"

A murmur of assent escaped from Marguerite. "Ah! heaven!" she said, "your husband differs from most men, and you, oh, my dearest, best friend, you are so different from all other women."

"I only agree with my husband," said Mariana gently, "I should like to be certain, if God took me, that I should be mourned as truly and tenderly."

"And if Mr. Gordon were to marry again?" inquired Madame Latour, rather quickly.

"I do not think that would happen," answered Mariana, as her soft cheek slightly flushed. "Though, if I know my own heart, I should not oppose anything if it were for his happiness. I should have no right to do so. I know that he long resisted, nay, disliked the idea of marrying poor me, thinking it a species of treason to her that is gone. But he was at length satisfied that it was for the children's good, and for that reason chiefly he took the step. And I know that

I have added to his happiness and to theirs," she said with a look of innocent elation.

"He must have been strangely constituted if you had not done so, my dear," said the older woman, patting the fair head of her companion, "for you have done your duty well, both to the living and to the dead."

It was arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were to leave for France early in the following week. Marguerite, after a period of doubt and hesitation, decided to accompany them. At first she had declined, though urged by Mariana, who declared that she would lessen her loneliness, and in a sense comfort the whole party. At length she consented. Shuddering at the idea of rehearsing the terrible tragedy which had so nearly deprived her of life, which had rendered the existence, so strangely preserved, of little comparative value, yet she wished to test adequately her husband's regretful love. She told herself that the feeling was morbid and wholly devoid of justification, yet knowing as she did, and seeing in every action of his life, his affectionate regard for Mariana and his younger children she had a sufficient proportion left of womanly natural instinct keenly to desire to gauge the real depths of his grief, the darkness of his sorrow over a grave no longer freshly dug, but which had now been green in the returning seasons.

They crossed the narrow sea, taking the two elder children and leaving the younger with a couple of those invaluable confidential servants still procurable in England. The season was of course the same; but how different the weather! as if the contrast was intentionally marked by Nature. The sea was waveless, the winds were hushed; a polar brightness, a tinted atmospheric clearness, prevailed. Again the gliding strength of the steam-giant speeds them over the smooth iron track. Again Marguerite feels the rush and swing as the long train sweeps round the curves when nearing their destination! How easily she can recall the scene on that dread night! — the sobbing winds — the weird storm-voices that cried to the fierce blast, the blinding sleet, the pallid dark-haired woman sitting shrinkingly opposite, wrapped in her sealskin cloak. Then the

shock, the awful crash, terror untold, indescribable darkness, death! For was it not death? Could she ever more consciously cross the dark boundary? And with what more terrible adjuncts and associations?

Now, if but the last Adversary came she could meet him cheerfully, almost willingly. With all her loved ones near her it would be—ah, so easy a flight from the dreary earth, this ruined world from which youth, and hope, and gladness had for ever departed. But could she cherish so selfish a thought? That bright girl; that noble boy, her own in so many points of resemblance, how much of life's joys had they doubtless before them, and the fair-souled, gentle wife, with so little of sin's alloy in her guileless heart, must she be hurried away from the home she had so beautified and blessed? Even Hugh Gordon, dark as was his brow and gloomy his spirit during these days of mourning, was there not much of the best part of life yet before the strong, self-controlled man, the tender father, the loving, thoughtful husband!

Providence had decreed her martyrdom. Be it so. She would bow to the fiat of the Supreme Being, trusting in His mercy even though He should slay her. Strength would He give her to bear it to the end; and let her never forget that she had an inestimable privilege granted to her in that she was enabled, by the circumstances of her position, to minister to the welfare of those she loved best on earth.

When the last sad day approached, and the mists of the grave rose before her eyes, hers would be the satisfaction of knowing that she had been true to the faith of her youth, to the creed of her womanhood, faithful to the noblest ideal of her sex, to the mandates of her God.

The train arrived at Montpellier at a comparatively late hour, when the whole party might be supposed to be fatigued, inasmuch as they had made no halt at Paris more than was caused by the necessary delay of the mail. But from Mariana she learned that, whatever might be the hour, nothing had ever prevented her husband from proceeding at once to the spot where his

wife lay—that he refused to take rest or refreshment until he had seen once more the sacred spot still so agonisingly dear. She herself usually went with him on the following morning, when together they visited the well-paid custodian of the cemetery and made any changes in the arrangements of the flowers and shrubs so carefully tended and constantly renewed when necessary. The children were taken to the spot, and the recollection of the irreparable loss was thus freely impressed on their minds. But on their first arrival Hugh Gordon invariably kept vigil during the whole night at the grave of his first love, only returning with the dawn, saddened and exhausted.

"It is a sorrowful season for me—for all of us, you may believe," said Mariana; "but I would not have it otherwise. It is a part of my husband's faithful, deep-souled nature; tender and true is he, if ever man was; and I value him the more deeply for his love for her—for *her* than whom no living woman ever better deserved such love. I can tell you all this freely, my dearest heart-friend, as the Germans say, for you are so wonderfully sympathetic — you understand us so thoroughly."

"I think I do," murmured her listener, who had leaned on one of the couches with her head on her hands. "I can hardly believe that I am still a dweller in this world of broken promises and forgotten vows while you speak. I could fancy myself in heaven listening to one of the white-robed band whose voices evermore are heard before the throne."

Rita and Alister, with "mother," as they always called Mariana, had retired to their apartments soon after their evening meal, tired out by their journey and the rapid succession of events since their departure from England, but to Marguerite came no thought of sleep. A strange and sudden train of thought took possession of her. She sat long in the saloon after she had said farewell in her room to Mariana, whose soft blue eyes were heavy with sleep, and whom natural fatigue had overcome.

The window opened upon a portion of the town planted in line with trees, now leafless, yet standing out

in full relief to the clear, cold winter sky. She recognised the locality and knew that it was not far from a narrow lane which led to a side entrance to the cemetery. She shuddered with emotion. Then an irresistible impulse seized her to behold with her own eyes her husband mourning over her grave, weeping over the urn which contained the ashes of a dead love with almost more than mortal fidelity.

She hastily threw over her dress a dark wrapper, took from a tiny *bric-à-brac* table a hat of Mariana's which happened to be there, and walked forth. Once in the open street, the cold, almost icy air revived and excited her. Her cheek was burning with a feverish fire. Her heart throbbed. A new life ran through her veins. No longer did she feel the langour and debility which for the most part oppressed her. She herself dared not analyse the strange and unwonted excitement which possessed her. She passed along the ways like one in a dream, and with a strength and swiftness which amazed herself, down the narrow lane which she remembered so well, having so often seen it from the hospital windows, and turning to the right the dark pillars of the century-old cypresses of the cemetery rose before her.

Before she left the hotel she had hastily rearranged her hair before the mirror. In her state of mental exaltation she had unconsciously given it a fashion dear to her more youthful days, and which her husband had always declared to be especially suitable to her regal form and bearing. The hat, too by curious coincidence, a garden hat of Mariana's, was of an old shape revived, and of the same pattern as the one she wore when she left her home on that fatal night for this fatal spot.

With a swift and gliding step, throwing behind her as with the act of volition the languor and unsteadiness of her general bearing, Marguerite Gordon passed through the outer gate of the cemetery and down the cypress-shaded entrance road, a veritable "Alley Titanic," until after a slight hesitation she reached the by-path for which she sought. But a short distance forward now, and she reached the space allotted to the stranger —to the dead wife of the sad, proud, English milord who had been so passionate in grief, so profuse with his gold.

A larger area than was customary had been yielded by the governing powers to the eagerly desiring foreigner who was so fervid in his desire to do honour to the last mortal relics of her he had loved. The costly fabric rose clear beneath the moonbeams. A marble portico classically proportioned protected a group, the work of one of the greatest sculptors of the day. It told with exquisite grace and poetic beauty the tale of Death's sudden triumph—of children's grief—of husband's despair. Around this sloped a tiny lawn, with grass of velvet smoothness, strictly cared for during every season of the year. Beyond were borders of the choicest flowers, again encircled and shaded by rare shrubs and majestic trees.

Its tasteful and finished beauty had appealed with effect to the sympathies of a Southern race, more prone than are we islanders to ornament the sacred resting places of the loved and lost. "The Englishwoman's Grave," as it was called, was one of the showplaces of the cemetery on *fête* days and those other occasions when the inhabitants gathered to place wreaths of *immortelles* upon the tombs of those they mourned.

As Marguerite approached the spot, still walking as one who in a dream is possessed by an enthralling idea, she observed that the gate was open. She passed in, looking at the group of marble figures, and wondering mechanically at the order and beauty of the small plantation

The moon, full orbed but declining, when first she left the hotel, was now low in the horizon, and the rays, obstructed by the masses of dark foliage, lent a subdued and mystic light to the shadowy, silent city of the dead. To her excited senses hollow murmurs and sounds, not of this world, commenced to be audible. A faint stir as of a far-coming wind, vocal with half-human tones, seemed to whisper amid the enormous trees. Strange forms and half-seen faces appeared to glide and flit through the avenues. A feeling arose in her heart that she also had been one of the dead, and might now be among those bidden to arise, as at the dawn of a resurrection.

As she stood gazing around, awe-stricken, wondering,

yet with her nervous system exalted and every physical power abnormally developed by the spell of the situation, a man's figure rose slowly from the turf beside the tomb, where the shade of a great cypress tree had darkened the spot, and gazed dreamily around. In his tear-stained face there was little expression but that of hopeless grief. For the moment the surroundings of the scene had brought back with terrible intensity to Hugh Gordon the agony which he had undergone on this very spot, at this hour, at this very season of the year. As he turned, his despairing gaze rested full upon the figure of Marguerite. The low moon had still further declined, and the uncertain light commenced to alter the outlines of all objects upon which it fell.

For the instant Marguerite felt as if she were transfigured. With head thrown slightly back, and figure poised erect, "with her old imperial air," as their eyes met it seemed as if a flash of electric light darted from them to his face with answering fire and tenderness.

Once more she was Marguerite Gordon. Yonder stood the idol of her youthful love, the man of her choice, the husband of her womanhood.

The unconsciously acted part of a new character—of her former self—was no cheat of imagination on her side. For as she instinctively held out her arms, Hugh Gordon advanced a step with eager longing, and yet with wonder and amazement, in every line of his face, to fall prone and senseless at her feet.

She stooped over his prostrate form. With loving word and fond caresses on brow and hair, she poured forth all the eager childlike fondness which women lavish in their hours of tenderness upon the men they love. She loosed his collar, raised his head, and watched with more than maternal anxiety for the first signs of returning consciousness. Trained to observe these accurately from experience in some of the phases of hospital life, she imprinted one wild kiss upon his brow, and tore herself away.

Out of the gate of the cemetery, down the dark alley, now seeming to her like one of the drear glades of the Inferno, did Marguerite Gordon flee like a hunted creature. Still strong in the mesmeric power by which

she was controlled, she gained the hotel, fortunately eluded the concierge—who, watching late for a generously paying inmate, had been solacing himself with a *petite verre* and a cigarette in another apartment—gained her own room, and flung herself shudderingly upon her bed.

After a while she arose and divested her apparel of all traces of midnight wandering. Carefully she folded up the waterproof wrapper, returned it and the hat to their places, then, utterly unstrung, exhausted, half unconscious, she lay down to await the morning light. With the dawn she awoke, and unflinchingly faced the day's melancholy task. She perceived clearly that Hugh Gordon had recognised her; but seeing her, in so suggestive a spot, it was equally certain that he believed her to be a supernatural visitant. The apparition of his lost Marguerite had been summoned from the tomb by the resistless power of his despair once more to greet his eyes, even while he recalled her death-day. Nature had succumbed. Brought face to face with a being from another world, even that loved one, never forgotten, the currents of life's blood had been arrested in their backward tide to the heart, and death had nearly claimed a fresh victim.

CHAPTER XIV

On the morrow Marguerite forced herself to rise at her usual hour, devoting the forenoon to the care of Rita and Alister who, with the curiosity of their age, were anxious to know all about the city. Was that distant range of mountains the Alps? Was it the Cevennes nearer at hand? Was there a Royal palace not far from the inn? as the *garçon* said, and was it true that the king used to come there now and then when he was tired of his court and sit among the flowers by the fountain, playing with his dogs, and would not let anybody see him if they wanted ever so much.

"I shouldn't do that if I was a king," said Alister.

"He was an old muff. I should have the best horses in the world and go hawking and hunting when I didn't like being at court."

"Ah! my dear Alister," said madame, "that would suffice, would it not, so long as one was *toujours gai*, and abounding with health, always, like you. But the poor king had a cruel headache sometimes, or was recovering from an illness, might he not then like to sit under the beautiful green arbors and listen to the fountains by moonlight? He perhaps, had been wounded in battle, and was oh! so feeble yet; would it not be peace and joy to him to be free from courtiers and mobs?"

"But why should he be ill?" said the boy. "Of course he might be wounded in battle, I know. It would not do me any good to poke away by myself, though; I hate sick people, too—all except you, madame," he said quickly as he saw tears rise in her eyes. "We all love you, you know that, don't you? Mamma and papa and all; but then you are like nobody else."

Rita did not speak for a while, but threw her arms round her teacher's neck, and nestling into her embrace, kissed her fondly again and again.

"Alister shouldn't have said that," she whispered, "but he speaks without thinking; he didn't mean anything, you know, darling madame; we know you are ill and weak, but we love you better than any one in the world, except papa and mamma. Are you not sure of that?" said the little girl eagerly; "and Alister wants you to forgive him, and give him a kiss. You will not be angry?"

"My darling—my darlings," said she clasping them both in her arms with sudden fondness, "do you think that I could be ever angry with you? Alister did not mean to hurt his poor madame's feelings, did he? Kiss me, my darlings, and then we must leave off story-telling and do some little lessons. Shall we not? We must not lose all the time, even though we are travelling."

Apparently busied with her ordinary tasks, Marguerite Gordon concentrated all her thoughts upon the main

object of making her disguise as complete as could be managed.

Alarmed at the possibility that she might be suspected of having visited the grave, desperate at the idea of a suspicion ripening into a conviction, dreading the result if her husband set himself determinedly to examine her features with a clue before him, she left no means untried to efface all similitude to her former self. She went carefully over the list of her former pious artifices, some of which safe in the success of her impersonation, she had abandoned. She replaced the green shade with which she formerly concealed her injured eye. She diminished her height by wearing low-heeled shoes, and exaggerated the limp under plea of rheumatism. She re-arranged her hair and wore a cap or head-dress which strangely altered the expression of her face. She rehearsed her French idiom, and altogether entrenched herself in the masquerade of the distressed foreigner, which she had at first assumed, that when Mariana, after a late breakfast, joined her in the *salon*, she expressed surprise and dismay.

"Why, how dreadfully ill you look, madame!" she said; "I am quite shocked. You have such dark circles under your eyes. You seem nearly as bad as when you came to us first! I really am distressed. Why did you get up at all? Jane could have looked after the children."

"Ah, *ma chère!* it must be then the air of France; it does not like me, I think, fine as is the weather. Recollections the most melancholy, the most poignant, have invaded me. I could not foretell, do you see, that I should have been thus affected. But indeed, I feel so wretched—surely of all women the most miserable."

And here, entirely forgetting her part, Marguerite gave way to the agony of the moment, and hiding her face upon her hands, broke into a passion of sobs.

Fortunately Mariana's heart was so full of actively benevolent feeling and sympathy, that there was not room in it for a grain of suspicion; convinced of her cousin's death, and never having heard of any faintest assertion to the contrary, she would have as soon imagined that the statue of Joan of Arc in the market

place might revive and prove to be her returned predecessor.

"Do you know that I think there must be something unwholesome in the air, though it looks so fine," she said. "I hope we are not going to catch fever of some dreadful kind. These foreign towns are so infamously drained. Do you know that Hugh is ill this morning, very ill indeed, though I tell him I don't wonder at it. He came home quite exhausted and looking like a corpse himself. If he had seen a ghost, as I told him, he could not have looked more changed or startled. He is in bed now, and will not get up, if I can help it, till the afternoon. Is it not strange?"

"I cannot think it strange," said madame brokenly; "that is considering the condition of Mr.—Mr. Gordon's mind, and the place, the *locale*. Were I you, I would urge him to return—his health may otherwise be affected. With you, I fear something peculiar in the air of this place."

"I will try to get him to leave to-morrow. We can take the children there this afternoon, and then to-morrow we can start by the early train, and stop all night at Lyons. That will break the journey, and we shall not feel the fatigue so much. But Hugh's health must be considered before all."

No sooner had the idea of Hugh's health suffering been presented to her than Marguerite reproached herself bitterly for not having thought of his probable danger at least as soon as Mariana.

"That proves," thought she with the bitterness of late regret, "that she is now more fitted to be his wife than I am. How promptly the fear of his suffering in health assailed her! How quickly she divined the remedy, while I, in the contemplation of my own miseries, forgot his safety—*his*, to whom, once, I so invariably, so instinctively deferred every thought of pleasure or of pain. Strange, most wondrous indeed it is!" thought she, "with this hateful falsehood of word and deed I am compelled to keep up, that I should feel myself almost losing my moral identity. I am commencing to think the thoughts as well as to speak the words of a hired teacher, of one who stands aloof

from the household, considering alone her paltry personal interests, shunning the holy self denial of other years and crystallising into egotism. Shall I ever sink into that condition I wonder? Why did I not die? Why should I live now to degenerate and perish like a lopped tree, shorn of all that make life lovely and fragrant?" She had hurried to her chamber as soon as Mariana had left her, and now surrendered herself to a fit of uncontrollable self-reproach and bitterest grief.

The season of abandonment to emotion rarely lasted long with a woman in whom the reasoning faculties had always been encouraged to predominate. She bathed her tear-swollen face; and, gradually recovering her self-possession, the disturbance of which was due probably more to physical reaction from the over excitement of the previous night than to true mental causes, she joined Mariana and the children in the *salon*.

Hugh Gordon entered the room soon afterwards, and as she heard his step she commenced to busy herself with the child Rita, who had just declared that she thought Montpellier a lovely place, and would like to live there always.

"You would tire of it, my darling," Marguerite answered, bending over the bright animated face of the eager child. "These foreign towns are pleasant for a short time, but oh! so lonely, so sad for English hearts afterwards."

"Did you ever live here, madame?" asked the child, playing with her thin hand caressingly. "And why did you not like it?"

"But yes, I did live here long, long ago," she forced herself to say shudderingly; "and ah! was I not glad to go away? I recall the time with horror, with shuddering."

As she spoke she looked up and saw Hugh Gordon's gaze fixed upon her. She avoided his mournful eyes by turning her head again to the child; then hurriedly said, "I have the pain, monsieur, that you have not your usual health for the moment. Do you think it wise to —to—watch by the dead in so awful a vicinage? Should you not rather consider your duty to the living? I speak as the friend of the family so intimate, so

favoured, which you have, oh, so kindly, permitted me to be."

"How can I forget the past?" answered he, gloomily pacing to and fro with folded arms, and groaning in uncontrolled bitterness of spirit. "Mariana herself does not urge me to do so. Peacefully happy as I am in her affection, I cannot be traitorous to my dead love. At times the desolation, the despair, returns with resistless force. My spirit seems wafted with hers to the region of the supernatural. Mariana! best of created women! does not this vex your gentle heart? I am ever grateful. God knows! for your sublime tenderness, but I cannot refrain — I shall not long survive to lead this divided life — I have had a warning."

These last words he pronounced with such a hopeless melancholy, in so utterly despairing a tone, that Mariana rose up in alarm and astonishment. "What do you mean, my dear husband? Are you losing your senses?"

"It may be so," he said. "I do not feel unduly excited though I have a feeling of unspeakable fear and dread. Still I saw her — I saw my dead love, Marguerite, last night, as plain as I see you now!"

Mariana fixed her soft eyes upon him for one moment in fearful wonder, then said gently, "You have over-tasked both mind and body, my dearest Hugh. I feared something of this nature would follow your over-indulgence in grief, sacred though it be."

"You have sense and reason on your side," he said. "But there are appearances in the world occasionally which transcend both. Yet I so far defer to your clearer judgment and solicitude for my welfare that we will at once return to our home. Commence your preparations; I promise you to restrain my emotions for the future within more conventional limits."

"And what about our evening walk to the tomb?" she said. "The children are anxious to go. Shall I put them off? I leave it wholly to you."

"Let us all go together for the last time," he said with a wistful, half-pleading smile. "It will perhaps be better that I should never return. But with my

children around me, and you by my side, dearest, I may surely make my last farewell."

Mariana who had glided to his side, pressed his hand fondly, and looked into his eyes that assent to his wishes which she so rarely withheld.

On that afternoon before the sun had fully set, the little party took their way to the cemetery. Marguerite would have excused herself, but Mariana begged so earnestly that she would go in order to support her in her endeavours to rouse and console her husband, whom she said she had never before seen so overwhelmed and prostrated, that she consented.

Winter though it was, the day was unusually mild and fair, soft floating clouds half veiled the sky's tender azure, permitting a transient brilliancy of colouring unknown in the austere north. The carefully tended shrubberies, the neat, well weeded paths, the level lawns, impressed the children, who had connected the idea of burial places with gloom and solitude. When they came to the resting place of Marguerite Gordon, they were loud in praise.

"Oh, what a lovely, lovely place!" said Rita. "When I die I should like to be buried here along with mamma, and not in England. How beautiful the mountains look, everything seems more cheerful than any other graveyard I ever saw. It would be easier to rise when you were called at the Judgment Day; would it not, papa?"

"My child," said her father, "heaven grant that it may be many a year first; but you shall have your wish if God takes you to Himself before my death."

"We can all be buried here if papa likes," said Mariana. "We shall not care to be separated even in death; but there may be many years of life, and not unhappy years either before us all. If we do our duty to God and one another, we shall not be unprepared to go when our time comes."

"In the meantime," said madame, in low and strangely moved tones, "there is duty to the living. Is it not so, beloved friends? She who sleeps here has been wept for with tears from the heart, with tears of blood; her memory is embalmed with spices of the most precious,

pressed from the true heart's sorrow. But now truly, she is dead and gone. What remains? To live out our lives—to enjoy such consolation as the good God mercifully spares to us. If she be the woman you say, and stood here where I stand, she would speak as I speak. Honoured as few dead women are, but few alas! her mournful shade will now wear a sad smile." Here Hugh Gordon started, and looked around from his reverie. "Let us return to our English home, and may the dead have power to guard and preserve the living!"

Carefully lowered and even measured as were the tones of madame's voice, there was a subdued fire and pathos in the words she uttered. As she finished she took the two children by the hand, and saying "Adieu, oh thou whom God saw fit so heavily to afflict; may His mercy save thy soul!" walked forth towards the outer gate. Mariana put her hand upon her husband's arm, who turning to her with a look of grateful affection, walked silently on the same path; once he turned and gazed long and earnestly at the whole scene —the distant mountains, the darkening masses of foliage, the still bright eve. Suddenly the sun fell below the horizon; a more solemn expression appeared to pervade the landscape. The shadows darkened, the faint tints of sunset rapidly became dim and colourless, a breeze moaned among the leafless trees, mingled as they were with the sombre evergreens. "So set the sun of my life," he said, "so faded all life and colour from it in one fatal hour. But for you, Mariana, I should have lain in that grave ere this by her side. I cannot forget my love for her who was once the very lamp of my soul, but do not doubt my affection for you, my chief earthly blessing. You know every thought of my heart, and have always, like the angel of pity that you are, borne with me. I feel that I have tried you too hardly. My grief has been selfish and engrossing. Henceforth I will endeavour to control myself."

"I would not have you repress one single thought, my darling Hugh," said Mariana, clasping his hand and looking at him with a half divine gaze of love and pity in her soft bright eye; "but I must really urge you to

think of your own health It is dear to me, you know, do you not? And what would the children do without you? What would all our lives be? Your grief is sacred and natural, but do you not think that it may be unwisely indulged? You do not look like yourself even now. I shall have to take strong measures when I return."

The journey across France, the voyage to England, passed with but the ordinary incidents of travel. As the distance increased from the scene which recalled the great sorrow of his life, Hugh Gordon's ordinary calmness of habit returned. Mariana ever assiduous and watchful was delighted to note the change in voice and general manner. He commenced again to observe the various traits of manner of the people—the curiously differing ways—which strike the observant traveller. He compelled himself to converse with his children, pointing out to them all that was worthy of being remembered that came within the scope of their intelligence. He mixed his conversation with chance acquaintances as the hour provided; and though still reserved of general habit, as was his wont, Hugh Gordon presented upon the day on which they reached their home, a very different aspect from that of a few days previously.

"How thankful I am to be at home again," said Mariana, as they once more drove up to the well-known entrance. "I have been suppressing my anxiety about the dear children and the household until I feel quite desperate. Oh! here they are—look, Hugh! Wilfred, and Emmeline, nurse with baby behind—how well he looks, darling pet, quite fat, I declare. Come in, madame! Oh, how happy I feel."

Three was the usual joyous tumult which occurs when heads of households return after a short absence. Cries and ejaculations, lavish gestures of affection, childish wonder and admiration, the respectful greeting of servants; a general feeling of gratitude for the coming rest and repose, for the safety of roof-tree and property: an amnesty for past offences, and great expectation for the future. Hugh Gordon could not escape from the general infection of joyfulness, whle

Marguerite gazed upon him with a wondering and half melancholy expression as she noted his eye brighten and his features relax when he fondled the later children of his hearth and gave mild assent to wifely assertions of a development of beauty and intelligence in them altogether unparalleled.

In the slight confusion which occurred owing to the eagerness of Rita and Alister, who insisted upon rushing into the house without reference to the heterogeneous articles with which they had loaded themselves abroad, Marguerite had, almost instinctively withdrawn to the entrance gate, and had occupied herself, partly as a distraction from feelings which painfully obtruded, in methodically noting that the packages and trunks unloaded from the cab corresponded with a list which she read from her pocket book.

Attracted by the arrival of the family, and the unwonted appearance of cabs at the long-silent portal, a few of the street population had gathered from curiosity and were now surveying the whole proceedings. A few women among the idlers, insensibly drew near, more easily to behold the numerous trunks, wraps, shawls, and mantles which appealed to their feminine sympathies. Among these was a poorly dressed, sallow woman, whose appearance gradually attracted madame's attention. A slight exclamation, unmistakably foreign of sound, caused her to regard her more intently. Their eyes met. Something in the stranger's appearance seemed to possess a potent attraction for madame. The stranger advanced a few steps nearer, and Marguerite shuddered as she recognised the hard feline features, the cruel eyes of La Chatte des Bois.

CHAPTER XV

MARGUERITE turned hurriedly and walked towards the house, signing to the driver to bring in the rest of the luggage. But it was too late. The hound had sighted the quarry ; the evil orbs of La Chatte had fixed

themselves serpentlike upon her face, her form, her every peculiarity of gait and manner. Strong in the concentrative malignity of hate, she could not be mistaken.

She made as if she would have followed her to the house, but was repulsed on the threshold by the well-trained servant.

"It won't do here, marm! No parties of your sort comes into this house. No! you don't! I'd recommend you agoing home and writing a letter. Your feelings is too much for you, just now."

For a moment the bead-like, intensely black eyes showed so lurid a glow as she raised her hand and glared fiercely into the face of the astonished footman, that he involuntarily recoiled, returning however with instinctive British pluck to his place.

Her mouth opened, she gasped for breath, her knees trembled and her whole frame shook. "Blessed if I didn't think as she was goin' to drop down dead on the doorstep with reg'lar downright rage. I've heerd of a woman as did it once," said John afterwards, in recounting his experience to the audience of the servants' hall.

But the spasm passed away. As the arrested current of blood rushed back to her heart the transformed woman, who had placed her hand to her side with a gesture of pain, gave a sigh that sounded like a curse. She moved slowly away.

"I go but to return, *cochon d'Angleterre que vous êtes; au revoir, madame la détenue!*"

The suddenness of the discovery made a hardly less painful impression upon Marguerite Gordon. She could not repress a shudder of fear as she saw again the cruel face—the treacherous eyes—of the woman in whose power she had been, from whom she had suffered so much evil, such ingenious tortures. The memory of the dismal days, the dreary nights of woe and dolour well nigh insupportable, returned with curious fidelity. She trembled as if for the moment she feared to be captured and taken back to that prison-house which transcended all horror, real or imaginary, that her mind could compass. A reactionary feeling, however, encouraged her,

coupled with a sense of thankfulness that she stood now upon her free English birthland, where secret thraldom and oppression are unknown, the signs of which need only to be unmasked to be torn down and trampled on by an indignant people.

She was safe, doubtless, in that dear land. What could any enemy, however relentless, compass against her? She had done nothing wrong. All the world might now, as ever, see every thought of her heart. How then, could she be injured? She would stay and defy this wretched woman, secure in the love and support of her friends.

For a moment she felt a return to that state of tranquil resignation which had of late been gradually taking possession of her mind. Here was her duty. In this home were all those whom she loved so unselfishly, so devotedly. After all, God's grace would enable her to divest herself of earthly feelings or merely mortal desires. She would finish her career with something of that sublimation of spirit with which, if sacred history erred not, the saints were imbued.

Yet in spite of her resolve, her fixed determination, her mind was not at rest. Her sleep was troubled, she awoke with half a scream, fancying that the malign form of La Chatte was bending over her; that she was vowed to carry her back to the prison-house she yet saw in her dreams; that the hour was come.

Ere the morning was advanced it appeared as if her dream was about to come true. A violent ringing at the bell was followed by the expostulating voice of the servant, mingled with harsh accents as of an excited foreigner. Marguerite turned pale as Mr. Gordon went into the hall. Then his calm voice was heard in answer to the angry tones of the stranger.

"Whom do you seek in this house?"

"I seek one whom I have known as a *détenue* and a maniac in my own land. She is an adventuress whom I will unmask. I, Manon Delorge, I saw her yesterday with these eyes."

"There is no one whom you know in this house. The lady who teaches my children may have been in your country. That is no reason why she should be exposed

to such a virago as you evidently are. Go away at once or I will have you turned out by force and given over to the police."

"And you!" said the fury, pointing her finger at Hugh Gordon, while everything that he had either seen or read of woman's anger, faded into insignificance before the concentrated malignity which gleamed in her feline eyes, "you are either a dupe or a criminal. Do you know whom she goes to call herself? Nothing less than Madame Marguerite Gordon—your wife that was killed! Does she impose herself upon you? or is her tale true, and have you two wives in one house?"

Hugh Gordon was for the moment staggered by the apparently circumstantial nature of the accusation. Then he began to reflect how easily a foreigner, vile and worthless as she certainly appeared to be, could have picked up sufficient information about the great sorrow of his life to make mischief or compel black mail. Every generous impulse of his nature rose in arms against the mode and the matter of the charge. His wrath blazed forth.

"Get you gone, worthless wretch that you are!" said he in her own language. "Is it likely that I should believe in an outcast, perhaps a *libérée*, like you, against a friend whose only misfortune has been that she has dwelt in your land, a land that nourishes such poison plants as yourself!"

He signed to the gardener—a sturdy, unimaginative Sussex clod—who, to the intense delight of his boy assistant, took the frantic woman by the shoulders, and, pushing her out of the gate, locked it upon the inside. Then her tameless temper still causing her to rave and scream and threaten, she attracted the notice of the nearest policeman, and was by him removed to a place of detention, where, being charged with riotous and disorderly conduct, she was on the morrow sentenced to a month's imprisonment.

Of this temporary deliverance the sole result for a time was much speculation by Mariana and her husband as to what could possibly have led to so strange a delusion on the part of the foreign maniac, as they considered her to be, all of which Marguerite had to

parry or to assent to with more or less difficulty and painful repression.

The explanation which occurred to them was that possibly some unfortunate creature from the scene of the disaster, confined in the hospital for incurables, and mingling in her delusions the name of the rich Englishman's wife, which was a household word in the neighbourhood, might have escaped and been accidentally reminded of one of the fragmentary romances of her disordered brain.

"How much more violent and dreadful these foreign women are!" said Mariana shudderingly, "than our own people."

"Some of *them* are bad enough," said Hugh Gordon with a half-smile, "though I dare say you have not been much in the way of forming an opinion."

"Thank heaven, no," answered his wife; "that form of human evil is unspeakably dreadful, almost loathsome to me; but if this wretched woman be not mad, there must be something very peculiar, even in her own land and nation, about her disposition."

"A woman from the South of France in a good stout rage," he said, "would impress most people with the idea of lunacy. Anger, you know, is said to be a brief madness. Here you have the verification of the old proverb."

The danger had passed, but Marguerite's nerves had received a severe shock. Now that this enemy, crafty, unscrupulous, and of deadly determination of purpose, had crept within reach, she would be always exposed to fresh assaults or machinations. Unsuspecting as was her husband or Mariana, a time might come when suspicion would arise that she was other than she seemed. If Mariana's womanly instinct were once aroused, the way to detection would be easy. She could only sigh and wonder that she had escaped it so long.

And what would be the consequences? She dreaded to contemplate them, scarcely less dreadful than those of the original disaster by which she had suffered so fearfully.

And the second misfortune would come by her own

act. How would every one blame her! How would she reproach herself that she had not taken a decisive step when she first returned from France.

Then she might have done what could not have been questioned either way. She might have boldly asserted her claim to the home and the heart of which she had been deprived by so cruel a fate, leaving Providence to right its own wrong; or she might have remained apart afar from the household which she was not willing—as an ill-omened *revenante*—to disturb, to destroy. Whatever she had elected to do would have been justified by a large portion of the society to which she stood responsible, as to her conscience, and to her God.

And now, by the temporising policy to which she had yielded, she had brought herself and those for whom she would have died to the verge of misery untold—of social ruin, of hopeless despair. She herself could find no words to express her sense of the awful results of full disclosure. What would be the natural feeling of all concerned? Her children—her own children—were now grown to sufficient age to comprehend the disgrace—the conventional criminality of a second marriage while a first wife was still living. They had become deeply attached to the sweet-souled woman whose invariable tenderness had endeared her to them as a second mother. The darlings of the home, too—the younger children—whose infantile prattle and childish cleverness were so often the theme of household converse—what was to become of them? They were unspeakably dear to her. They had taken the place of the lost darlings of her own wedded youth—strange and inexplicable as it might seem to those who have not probed the mysterious recesses of the human heart.

Marguerite had even less than most of her sex of that narrow-souled jealousy of other women, for all reasons or none, who might by possibility find favour in the eyes of the master of the household. It would have been possible for her, in the days of a less restricted social code, to have dwelt lovingly and loyally in the tent of the Great Sheik, whose household contained more wives than one, and was not therefore held to be accursed before God and man.

She would have joyed over the infant beauty of that younger son whose virtues were to exercise so powerful an influence over the future of his tribe—nay, over the destiny of the human race. Each child of that wondrously directed household would have instinctively fled to her knee in pain or peril, and when Rachel lay dead in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethleham, she alone would have closed her dying eyes, taken the orphaned babe to her breast, and mingled her tears with the patriarch as he mourned for the bright face that had so early faded—for the sweet tones of a voice for ever hushed.

No—the meaner passions had no abode in the "fiery yet tender soul" of Marguerite Gordon. She could take to her heart the dark-eyed prattler, the youngest babe of the household, and seeing in its every feature the father's lineaments, yet fondle and cherish the unconscious intruder. She could encourage the confidence of the undemonstrative Wilfred, who, inheriting with his mother's fair brow and gentle eyes her dislike to aggressive action, was, in his father's opinion, too unambitious for a boy. In every domestic trial, such as must of necessity occur in all human associations, she was the balancing—the gently controlling power which regulated the machine.

Such was her present position, such the feelings in strictest accordance with the higher interests of all concerned to which she had gradually but completely schooled herself, not without those struggles of the imprisoned soul, those passion-throes, which seem to shake the very foundations of our being. But by ceaseless prayer, by undoubting faith, by the sincere and earnest exercise of those means of self-repression of which, from her childhood, she had learned the value, progress sure and steadfast was effected; an arrest of all merely personal aspiration was attained. In deep humility the standard of renunciation was planted, yet with tearful confidence that it would remain unshaken by any gust of human emotion. She could now comprehend the serene security of the elect. She could now realise "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

But the longer Marguerite Gordon reflected upon the new aspect which her circumstances had assumed, the deeper became her conviction that disaster was approaching, and that her safety lay in flight.

She knew well, the relentless, unsparing she-wolf, by whom she was pursued. Patient as are the beasts of prey inimical to man, she would in the end discover the trail. She had been baffled at the onset, but Marguerite did not underrate the deadly determination which must insure an evil triumph at the end.

"How strange it seems, that one's enemies—indeed I have but two, that prejudiced Dr. Daubigny and she—should exhibit such persevering courage in attack while friends chiefly act on the defensive."

She could not deceive herself. Some day La Chatte would arrive, cool and malignant, ready and armed with all her proofs, with letters and facts in full array, with Dr. Daubigny's official declaration, containing a closely accurate description of the missing Madame Hoche, who was known by all the inmates of the hospital to call herself Madame Marguerite Gordon. These facts would be embodied in carefully worded official language, signed "Daubigny" and properly attested. That ornament of the French medical school would henceforth deem that he had conclusively proved the existence of another most convincing case of the "*maladie universelle d'Angleterre.*"

The danger was imminent. The evil fate which had apparently pursued her, the relentless destiny, of which she had read so often in the old days of love and happiness, had so idly thought of but as connected with the lives of others, had become a tangible fiend, in close pursuit of her own soul. Again she asked herself what sin she had committed before Heaven that she should have been so persistently marked out for destruction, for misery in this world, for aught she knew, even for condemnation in the next? There might even be no clearer demonstration of supreme justice in realms above, how then could she be certain of escaping a doom as disproportioned to her deserts as had been her portion below. Again the temptation arose strong before her to defy the restraints of duty which had imprisoned

her soul so long, to demand her just rights and resign to that Providence which had seemed unable or unwilling to protect her, the unravelling of the mysterious tragedy of her life.

Such were her thoughts; wild and vehement were the passionate longings which shook her very being as she thought of the sudden success which might attend so daring a resolve. But the reign of the tempter was short-lived. The pure soul of Marguerite Gordon was but for a brief interval overshadowed by the dark wing, the evil presence of the destroyer, the whispering fiend that corrupts the heart, that smirches the fair blossom of angelic womanhood, that ever deteriorates, ere he destroys the diviner faculties that exalt humanity. Again she arose from that sincerest supplication for more than mortal aid and support, which had never yet failed her in her darkest hours. Arose with renovated will, strong in the power of unselfish resolve. So far she had done well. So far she had considered only the happiness, the best interests of others, of those whose welfare was intertwined with the tenderest, deepest feelings of her heart. Was she now to shrink and falter ere the goal was reached? Was she to exhibit that feminine instability, that contemptible infirmity of purpose which she had so often denied to be one of the natural attributes of her sex? No! One woman should at least die with her hand upon the Cross, renouncing with God's help the light and colour of life; all hope of earthly happiness; all comfort, ease, pleasure, here below.

As for the sacrifice, it was bitter with sorrow unutterable, with despair more dread than death. Still had not the chosen exemplars of her sex, the spiritual queens of her race, dared even more? In the unspeakable martyrdoms of the early ages of Christianity, when tender girls and helpless women were torn asunder by ravenous beasts before a degraded populace, exulting in their death agonies, had not the still more terrible sacrifice of womanly shame, the destruction of female modesty, been exacted as a crowning torture; and had not these torments been borne unflinchingly, only for the sake of their common faith? Had not even those

heroic souls of a more distant age, uncheered by the light of Bethlehem's star, dared wounds, torture, death, actuated only by the natural affections for husband, son, lover, which, unaided by a purer faith, were still found sufficient to impel to supreme self-sacrifice? Thinking of these things was it for her to hesitate?

The portrait of Marguerite Gordon has been limned with feeble brush and dimmest colour if the reader has not learned to look upon her as one of the exemplars of our race who, when touched with the fire of high resolve, knew thenceforth neither doubt nor delay.

Clearly had she described the approaching storm, As clearly had she foreseen the only means, the priceless sacrifice by which alone the household wreck could be averted. Agony beyond description was hers ere she had completed her resolve to cast away the sole remaining solace of a ruined life. But the conflict was over, the victory was achieved. With dry eyes and a burning pain at brow and heart, she would commit her dead to the hungry waves. Fathoms deep, beyond all plummet line, would she sink her dead love, her dead joys—her very name and personality henceforth would be obliterated from the world's calender, the world's memories; ah me! for evermore.

This done, that precious argosy, freighted with all her treasures—the husband of her youth, the children of her love—would float safe and unharmed, amid the smooth seas and gentle gales of a prosperous life.

She would have passed out of their existence; she would have obliterated the life that had been so sad to her that promised to be so disastrous to others. The tomb of Marguerite Gordon in the flower-decked Southern cemetery would gradually crumble into decay, and none should ever know that the ill-fated woman who bore the name had survived to hide her sorrows, and to close her eyes amongst strangers in a far, wild land, alike ignorant of her name and her misfortunes.

CHAPTER XVI

HAVING dismissed all other considerations but the all-important one of the necessity of instant flight, the necessary preparation was a relief to Marguerite's over-taxed mind. Quickly and silently she adopted all needful precautions. In one person only did she confide. To Madame Faucher she related her story, convinced that the sifter of motives, had probably acquainted herself with some of the circumstances of her case already. She had judged her to be the kind of woman to whom it was unwise to make half confidences, and rightly so. Madame lifted her eyebrows in real astonishment however when she heard the actual facts, and loudly appealed to *le bon Dieu* to grant her patience with the apparently inexplicable wrongs of humanity.

"What had her dear friend done, she so pure, so saint-like, so angelic in her renunciation for the sake of others? *Ma foi!* had it been her!" and here Madame Faucher clenched her teeth, and a quick sparkle came into her gray blue eyes. What had madame done that she should be sacrificed—crucified? Plainly the selfish, the wicked had the best of it in this world. For her, heretical thoughts made themselves to assail her faith. She must speak to her *directeur*, *ma foi.*"

The torrent of surprise and indignant pity flowed past, and for once the philosophical Madame Faucher was stirred with regard to wrongs that had no bearing on her personal interests, Marguerite calmly explained that she had taken her resolution unalterably, and it now only remained to carry out her plan.

"Where then was she to go? Not to France, it was too full of sorrowful memories for more than for her; *hélas!* not to Germany—a heavy and materialistic race were incapable of comprehending a soul like that of madame."

"I have already decided," said Marguerite, in a firm clear voice. "I shall go to one of the English colonies. There I shall be among my own people, though strangers to my history. I can there die in peace. A

forgotten life, a lost name, it will end some day. It is better so."

"If it be so," said madame; "I knows those of my country that have gone there. They speak well of it. *Ma foi!* a land of corn and oil—of wine yes—and of sunshine. Ah! I could recall—what is the name so curious—Nou Sou—Peste? Nouvelles Galles de Sud, so it was called. The city of Sidonie, *comme ça!* Why not go there?"

"I have caught the name," said Marguerite wearily. "One place is the same as another to me. Why not indeed go there—why not anywhere? But how to make the arrangements for sailing?"

"I have it—it is *le bon Dieu* that sends to me the inspiration," cried out madame rapturously. "I was yesterday advised of a *jeune mariée* of the name Madame Lecomte. She goes to join her husband, an *émigré* of last year. He lives at a gigantic wool farm amid the *pays sauvage*, *le boscage s'appelle-t-il.* Marie is good, she is gentille. On Thursday she sails in *le Calédonien*, a ship of our nation, *bateau à vapeur*, of the Messageries Maritimes."

"That is well, madame, and removes much of the difficulty. I shall not be a solitary voyager, but I should prefer to accompany some family as governess or companion. I dread being left by myself, and the time is short."

"Be assured that *le bon Dieu* will arrange that for you also. We will put in a message in *Le Temps*—an advertisement as you call it. Perhaps in the same ship there may be one who has sympathy for sorrow, or who requires consolation as you do. Let us hope! I send the advertisement this night. 'A lady wishes to go to Australia in a situation as governess or companion.' It is done. I say it, *moi qui parle*, Celine Faucher."

Madame's practical way of thought and action, combined with her restless energy, bore down any slight show of opposition that Marguerite might have thought of exhibiting.

"What will you then? It is of all things necessary to decide. You cannot remain here; that infamous

Chatte des Bois—*Chatte d'enfers*, that she is, would betray you. Then the household is ruined! Madame Gordon becomes ill, *dangereusement*, overwhelmed with tears and self reproach. The children are desolate. Monsieur *votre mari*—ah, *ces hommes!* What of him? Does he embrace you with tears, he pronounces the death sentence of his now wife, *gentille, douce, dévouée, qu'elle est, par exemple. Il est trop fort pour lui.* He may even regard you as a *revenante*, fatal to the household. But they come to change, these men! Do I not know that, I, Celine Faucher? No, *ma petite*, you have taken the heroic. You are *Jeanne d'Arc*; you are *Gabrielle d'Estrées.*" Madame's history was not her strong point. "You will be resolved to the last. There is no half measures possible."

So madame rattled on with uplifted head, excited expression, and waving hands. The situation was somewhat coarsely put, but Marguerite could not deny the accuracy of the picture, inartistic as might be the colouring. Yes! Madame was right. Any day might bring a terrible, irrevocable *exposé*. Nothing but wrong and ruin could result. In no way could reparation be *now* made. In no way could the riven, forcibly rent bonds be replaced without terrible wrong—tragic and fatal suffering.

Marguerite Gordon was not the woman to put the torch to the funeral pyre where all whom she loved would be consumed. Sooner, rather would she have doomed herself to a physical as she had done to a moral death.

With her usual energy Madame Faucher had caused the advertisement on the evening of their first conversation, and the atomic waif in the great literary universe germinated with surprising celerity.

Just before luncheon time, on the following day, a stout middle-aged dame alighted from a cab at the Pension Faucher, and, holding up a crumpled fragment of newspaper, inquired for the lady proprietress. Madame was of course enchanted to see her, but had the pain to tell her that the lady to whom the advertisement referred was not quite certain whether she could, after all, undertake so long a voyage. Here

the visitor's face assumed so genuine an expression of disappointment that madame, who had adopted the ruse in order to feel the pulse, so to speak of the probable employer, was much gratified. "She will pay her well and treat her well," she said to herself. I am glad I know that she is *passionée* about securing her. Were it not for me she would give herself for nothing. Well, *le bon Dieu* helps those who cannot help themselves."

Finally an appointment was made for the following morning at an early hour, and the stout lady took her departure, intimating that she must have an ultimatum on the morrow.

When Marguerite returned—she had been accidentally absent—in order to complete the last of her preparations, madame exultingly related how she had stimulated the eagerness of the possible benefactress by the little artifice she had used.

"*Ma foi!* but she is resolute to have thee. I told her of thy perfect Parisian French, thy angelic temper, thy misfortunes—wounds of Algeria—*enfin*, everything that goes to make a phœnix among women. She believes all: Thou art her *bonne enfant*, her sister henceforth."

"You have taken some trouble in vain," said Marguerite wearily. "You did it for the best I know; but why disguise the truth? I am as anxious to go away, to quit this land, this old world where I have been so miserable, so hardly treated, as she can be to have me. I wonder why she could care to be troubled with one like me?"

"There are reasons," said madame oracularly — "reasons, ah! *oui*. She has a daughter who has now to quit school. That *grosse Anglaise*, she speaks not the French. Monsieur le mari is also dumb save in his barbaric language *d'Albion*. Thou hast therefore to be the interpreter, to carry on the lessons of *mademoiselle la fille*. What then, does thy heart sink within thee? Is it not too late? I open for thee a door of escape."

"On the contrary it will be so much the better. Occupation is what I need. If they are kind people I ask no more."

"But I will ask more—*moi qui parle.* Where will she get such another? She must pay thee two thousand francs for the year. I will have it so."

But Marguerite, acknowledging that to madame she owed the favourable opportunity of flight from the difficulties which beset her in the land of her birth, declined to permit any bargaining to be transacted on her account.

At the appointed hour the same stout personage appeared, and was ushered into madame's best reception room.

In a few minutes Marguerite entered the presence of her "employer." Ah me! how strange, how unnatural would the word have sounded at one time! How piteously familiar was it even now becoming to her ear!

The stranger looked searchingly at the pale, dark-robed woman, then, with a softer voice and more gentle manner than might have been expected from her appearance, said, "You wish, I understand, to go to Australia as companion and that sort of thing? Can you teach, too, or would you rather not?"

"I can teach French and German, music, and perhaps some other things," said Marguerite, quietly. "I should prefer to make myself as useful as possible."

"And you've quite settled to go all the way? It's a longish voyage, mind, though Joe and me—that's Mr. Baldhill, my husband—we've made it three times now, and might go again for all I know. That French party seemed to think as you was uncertain."

"I have made up my mind now," replied Marguerite; "I require no time for preparation, I am alone in this world." A tear would come, and the words faltered on her lips.

"Then it's a bargain, my dear," said the old lady. "We'll have you, if you'll have us. We pay you a hundred a year. Joe wouldn't let me offer less. 'Get a lady,' says he, 'as is a lady, and don't bother about the salary—the woman's the main thing.' And there's Bella to think about—that's our girl, she's seventeen last March—so that's settled, isn't it? We did intend to leave her behind at school, but after what happened about poor Sydney"—and here the lady touched her crape dress, and for awhile was silent—"Why, Joe

wouldn't leave his gal behind—wouldn't hear of it, not if she never learnt a word of music or French."

"I have no doubt we shall be very good friends," said Marguerite, as she placed her hand in the somewhat comprehensive palm of the stout lady. "We have both known sorrow."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Baldhill; "we have indeed. I see it in your face. Joe and I 'most broke our hearts when Syd died. But it passes away, don't it? We have Bella to live for now, and one another. But I can tell you all about it aboard ship; it eases my heart. I ain't like some of them people that can't talk of their sorrows. I like to bring 'em back, and see 'em again as they used to be. I know I'd like talking about it to you, my dear. But what was I sayin'—about the ship sailin', wasn't it?"

"I should like to know when she does sail," said Marguerite. "I have one or two matters—and only these—to attend to."

"Oh, didn't I tell you all the time? Well, my head's woolgathering, as Joe says, half the time. Well, it's the day after to-morrow; that's the reason I was so frightened about losing you. I know there'd never be a chance of getting another one like you in that time. That Frenchwoman seen I was afraid of losing you. She thought I didn't drop to her, but I did. We're plain people, Joe and I, but we know enough for the likes of her."

"She perhaps was over-anxious to serve me," said Marguerite; "but she means well and has a good heart. It need not be a matter of question between us. At what hour shall I be ready?"

"You be at London Bridge station at one o'clock, Thursday. This is Tuesday, you know; we'll meet you there and go right off to Calay, or whatever it is they call it. Then we go through to Marseilles. You know that line, I suppose?"

"Ah! how well!" murmured Marguerite.

"You don't like railway travelling?" said Mrs. Baldhill quickly. "No more do I. I'm always afraid of something happening. Ain't you? Well, we'll have lots of time to talk about that, and more things, too,

before we get to Galle, and then there's three weeks of mighty quiet life. Well, good-bye, my dear; you won't fail us? You'll see Bella then."

"I shall be there. You may depend on me."

Mrs. Baldhill fixed the shrewd kindly eyes upon her face with the same searching glance which she had bestowed upon her at the first part of the interview. Then she said quietly:

"I believe I can; yours is a face that has truth written upon it. Good-bye till then. I told you, didn't I, that it was *The Caledonian*, one of them French embassy boats? Joe's took such a fancy to 'em for some reason or other, though of course we can't speak a word of their lingo, we shall go about the deck like two images; but he don't mind that. He says the cooking's that splendid that it makes up for everything. Now good-bye again, my dear. I do really believe I shall keep saying good-bye till tea-time."

. . . . . .

Long and sadly did Marguerite Gordon ponder over the nature of the step she was about to take, the distinctly fateful change she was about to effect in her whole existence. What an incalculable distance did the ten thousand miles of ocean represent to her who had never sailed upon a larger sea than the Channel or the Mediterranean! How completely could she now appreciate the passionate despair which had tempted exiles in other days to terminate an existence which offered nothing but loneliness and privation! Almost unto death was the pressure of the awful dread which seemed to envelop her being at the thought of leaving her beloved ones, loved in secret, though once acknowledged so openly. How strange it seemed that she could ever have rejoiced over them without fear or shame! But with day came higher hope, a clearer and more reasonable state of being. She had given her word, and she would abide by it. She was no child, no inexperienced girl, to flinch from the ordinary dangers which so many shared.

Say that the country was strange, the people unfamiliar? They would be more interesting; the necessarily defensive position would all the sooner restore her

mental equipoise. Her new friends, wealthy proprietors, as madame had informed her, appeared to be kind and worthy, if somewhat unrefined. They had suffered loss and sorrow. There would be a community of feeling. But whatever might happen she was resolved. The fate of others lay with her. It was too late for scruples, for sensitiveness. She had reasoned the matter out. She had arrived at a determination which nothing now should tempt her to alter.

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE the appointed hour Marguerite had little more than a day in which to enjoy the sight of the beings most dear to her on earth. She was not even to have the miserable satisfaction of bidding them farewell. She would listen to the voices of her children, every tone of which thrilled the inmost chords of her heart. She would see the calm face, and hear the well-remembered accents of him whom only of all men on earth she had loved, whom yet she held to be king and chief of his race. She would leave them perhaps expectant of her presence on the morrow—leave them, knowing full well that she was in all human likelihood to see their faces, to hear their voices no more. Was it not the cruellest stroke of fate that she was forbidden to tell them of her departure?

That last night—how well remembered in the after time—she had remained later than the ordinary time for departure.

Alister and Rita had been engaged with her in some simple game which could be protracted at will. It was beyond their ordinary bed-time, but she seemed unwilling to let them go from her presence, making playful excuses to the strictly punctual Mariana. They remembered afterwards that she kept her gaze fixed on their faces, that as much as possible she encouraged their peculiarities of temperament. At last she kissed

them both more warmly than she was wont to do, calling them back again for a last good-night, and telling them that, as they had been good children with their lessons that week, she would buy them each a present on the following day.

As they were retiring Mr. Gordon entered the room, having been detained by a sitting of a scientific society.

"What do I see?" exclaimed he with affected horror. "Children up at half-past ten o'clock at night! Why, Mariana! you and madame have been relaxing the bonds of discipline with a vengeance! What wonder has come to pass?"

"Only that we have all been so happy together while you left us alone to amuse ourselves, sir! I don't think I ever saw madame in better spirits. I am sure she will be a different woman before long. Rita was quite frolicsome, and Alister has been the best of boys."

"So much the more reason that they should go to bed now. Good-night, you scapegraces! Madame spoils you, I really believe."

Marguerite sank on the sofa, and watched the retreating forms of the children—her children—with an expression which had suddenly changed from that of loving fondness to one of sad regret, of hopeless despair.

Such was the look of dejection, that when Mariana, having, after the manner of happy wives, engrossed her husband's attention by a course of mixed questioning, turned again to her, she was quite startled by her altered appearance.

"Certainly, madame! you do change from one sort of looks to another more quickly than any one I ever saw. Just as one thinks you are all right, going to be well and get all your strength back again, you go wrong again in a few minutes. Nobody would think you were the same woman you were before Hugh came in!"

"*Are* we the same people, do you think, at different times, and under all circumstances?" queried Marguerite, musingly. "I have sometimes doubted it. Doubted whether the body, as the spirit, is not susceptible of material change. How otherwise can we

account for the astonishing divergence of action by the same people?"

"You are too deep for me. I must get Hugh to answer you. People cannot really be changed, I suppose, unless in the way the magicians changed people in the *Arabian Nights*—a prince into a bird, a wicked woman into a black dog, and so on. But there are no sorcerers nowadays. I think, do you know, my darling madame, that you are going to be ill? People often are when fancies come into their heads."

"If so I had better go home to my lodgings for a week. No, really I must go. I sent my things there this morning. I feel it coming on."

"Oh, nonsense! I can nurse you. What a mistake to go into that small room of yours with nobody but your landlady and Madame Faucher to see you."

"You know that I can always tell," said Marguerite, "when my attacks are coming on. I feel that I must be then alone. I am certain that I am going to have a far worse one than usual to-morrow—worse perhaps than I have ever had before, and I must bear it alone —alone. God help me," she added, "and may He give me strength!"

"And you will not let me nurse you?" Mariana said. "I can't help thinking that it is very unkind, considering all you have done for us. But I know that you will not change your mind. You have not done so yet, at any rate; and yet you might trust me wholly—could you not?"

"Yes," said Marguerite, as she returned the kiss which Mariana, who had thrown her arms round her neck, pressed upon her lips with all a girl's fondness. "Yes, dearest, you are worthy of all my love and confidence. But it may not be. I cannot explain. I must bear my lot with patience and faith. God knows how to direct our paths. And now, say good-night and let me go. I will send a note to-morrow afternoon which will tell you how I am. Kiss the darling children for me to-morrow, and tell them I am thinking of them. God bless you, my dearest; always remember me—I mean," she added, "in your prayers."

"Why, one would think," said Mariana, as she

laughingly disengaged herself from the sisterly embrace which had so lovingly and sincerely passed between the two women, "that you were going away. I do not know what Hugh will think when I tell him; he had no idea you were ill. You must have tired yourself out with the children. What shall I tell him? I know he is in that wretched study of his."

"Tell him—tell him," said Marguerite with fainter utterance, "only that he has the dearest wife in the world, and to cherish her as his heart's best treasure."

"No," said Mariana, softly; "he won't believe that; nor would I say it; but I try—I always have tried—to do what *she* would have wished."

. . . . . .

The day was strangely soft and bright for an English February as Marguerite drove to the railway station with her modest luggage. Clear was the sky and still the air; but for a few fleecy clouds, one of the fairest days of the forgotten autumn might have returned to grace this, perhaps, the wildest month of the stern winter of the north.

She had no difficulty in recognising a group of passengers upon the platform the members of which had been eagerly looking out for her. Beside her friend, Mrs. Baldhill, was a square-built, fresh-coloured man, with a keen eye and a pleasant, good-humoured countenance. He was well dressed, according to the fashion of the day, in a suit of the rough tweed garments which seem to commend themselves to all travelling Britons. Beside him stood a strikingly handsome girl, with masses of fair hair in contrast with a mourning dress, who gazed at the new-comer with the deepest interest. Mr. Baldhill raised his hat as she approached, and then greeted her warmly as she was introduced by his wife.

"Very glad to see you, Mrs. Morton—Mortimer—yes, that's it." (The name had been carefully considered both by herself and Madame Faucher). "I thought we should have lost you at one time by what the missis said. Now, I hope we shall all be happy and comfortable together. Bella here ain't a bad girl to manage; are you, pet?" (Here he gave his daughter

an affectionate squeeze.) "And me and the missis are pretty good to get on with when we know people and like 'em."

The girl blushed slightly, and while returning her father's loving grasp looked apologetically at Marguerite. "Father thinks there's no one like me. You'll have to pull me up now and then, Mrs. Mortimer. But I'm sure we'll be good friends, and I'm glad you're going with us."

"And I, too, my dear," Mrs. Mortimer replied. "I naturally feel sad at leaving England, but your kindness has made my heart lighter already."

"Well, now," suggested Mr. Baldhill, "let us take our seats before the rush comes, and make ourselves comfortable."

"Here, my man," he said to a porter who was eying the group with a well-founded expectation of largesse; "you look after all this luggage, and see it labelled proper, *via* Marseilles. Blessed if they didn't send some of our things to Bordeaux once; didn't they, missis? I'll come back to see it's done, my word! And now for a good carriage."

Mr. Baldhill showed by his knowledge of the best seats in an empty carriage, and the careful disposition of the luggage, that his experience as a traveller and a colonist had not been thrown away. Before the late-arriving passengers commenced to throng the platform and crowd the carriages the little party were ensconced in a comfortable compartment, into which, strangely enough, no others essayed to enter, a short interview with one of the officials and the transfer of one of Mr. Baldhill's freely-parted sovereigns having probably sufficed for this arrangement. The journey to the sea, the short confusing passage, the landing, the re-entrance into the train, all passed before Marguerite like portions of a half-remembered dream. It was not until they were speeding along the too well-remembered line to Marseilles that memory recalled those early days with dreadful completeness. How all things came back as if of yesterday!

Her ill-fated journey to the south, her husband's presentiment, his futile attempt to shake her resolution—

ah! why did she not yield? Aunt Angela, the beloved, the long-mourned, died without her tendance after all. The last sad moment; his fond embrace; her dull, deep heartache when they severed for ever—for ever! Could she have known it! The melancholy weather the very storm-voices boding dread misfortune, endless sorrow! The grief-worn features of the faded woman on whom she had taken pity, the woman whose shattered corse lay in her grave, over whose last resting-place was the legend of her name, family, and death day. And now she was speeding along the self-same railway *en route* for a far strange land of which she had hardly heard, journeying with strange people, trusting wholly in their good faith for whatever future life might have in store for her. And was all this real? Could it be so? The clashing roll and rattle of the heavy lengthened train was in her ears as then. She felt the whole train of carriages shudder as they swung with resistless force around the sharper curves. All things were repeated. It seemed as if she were rehearsing a former act in the theatrical scene which represented her life. Would a heartshaking crash again be heard, or a collision take place, filling the air with screams of pain, with groans of mortal agony? Would the dead and dying again be carried past in sad procession? She almost said in her heart that she cared not. Was she not past all human joy—care—sorrow? But as she looked forth into the clear southern night, where already the stars appeared to burn with a richer lustre than in the land she had left—as she marked the fair face of the girl asleep on her father's breast, she prayed God to bless them, to give her faith and patience, even a measure of hope with which to support the burden He had cast upon her.

In that hour her heart was unconsciously lightened; she felt a stronger, more definite inclination to take up the work which lay nearest to her, to act in accordance with the circumstances by which her lot had been recently moulded. She addressed Mrs. Baldhill, and inquired whether the passage had fatigued her.

"Well, I don't feel very bright, my dear, I must say; but I think poor Isabel felt it more than any of us. Them seasick people and their basins—ah! That bit

of sea in the little dinghey of a steamer's worse to bear than the whole passage out and back again. I'm glad we're clean over it. We get a rest at Marsells, and once aboard *The Caledonian* we're at home, as one may say. I wish I was there now and breakfast ready."

Marguerite could not altogether sympathise with Mrs. Baldhill's aspiration for the material comfort indicated, but she continued the conversation with the old lady, who was tired of the monotony of the journey and pleased to talk.

The whistle announced that they were nearing a station, and she exclaimed with surprise at the quickness with which the time had passed, adding, "It's all your pleasant talk, my dear; and now, please, ask one of those fierce-looking porters to send us out some coffee and rolls. I feel as if I could relish something light."

The latter part of the journey was fraught with painful memories, obscured with dread shadows of the past; human nature, however, can but bear a certain weight and measure of sorrow. The victims of the rack are alleged to sleep; those doomed to hopelessness, endless grief, must needs have their periods of repose, of "surcease of sorrow." Busying herself henceforth with all small offices by which she could in any way lighten the cares of the worthy pair—who were unable to communicate their ideas in the idiom of the country, and yet full of eagerness and curiosity, besides being anxious about their luggage—she eased her heart, and felt a perceptible difference in the weight of the chain she was ever vowed to wear.

Perhaps she found more pleasure in talking to her pupil, who, now fully awake, was equally curious as to many foreign ways and phenomena. Isabel almost amused her with her naïve and fearless utterances.

When the great steamer was reached, and they, with their luggage, were safely conveyed upon her lofty deck, Marguerite was surprised to find how much the novelty of the surroundings had power to arouse interest.

Born with a nature, too, of great original force and vitality, unexpected reserves of energy long latent were now beginning to develop themselves. The dark features

and Oriental garb of the crew, the grotesque Easternry of the negro stokers, the miscellaneous herd of passengers, the vast size and unfamiliar arrangements of the ocean steamer, the mixture of the races in the streets of Marseilles with its storied past and quaint environment, all these things vivified the adventurous portion of her many-sided nature, and even added to her manner an animation which surprised her companions as much as it pleased them.

"The sea will agree with you, Mrs. Mortimer," said Mr. Baldhill; "you look ten per cent. better already. You'll have the pull of us all the voyage through being able to speak to the captain and officers. I've got the purser to put you up next him. I knew him before in Melbourne. I wish Bella would learn to talk their lingo as easy as you do. It's no more trouble to you than English, I really believe. She learned it at school, but it don't seem no good to her. I suppose it was the right kind. I paid for the best, I know."

"Your daughter has been well grounded in the grammar of the language, and has a very good accent. All she needs is practice, such as she is sure to have on the voyage, to give her confidence. You will see in a week or two how she will get on."

Mr. Baldhill looked admiringly at the speaker and then at his wife with a sort of "I told you so how it would be" expression of countenance, and then, taking her arm, the worthy couple walked up and down the extensive promenade afforded by the flush lines of the deck. Marguerite then applied herself to discover the young Frenchwoman of whom Madame Faucher had spoken, and being successfully aided by the stewardess, came upon a frightened-looking, girlish creature, sitting in a melancholy manner on a solitary chair. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Madame Lecomte, *née* Marie Voisin, of Rouen?" said she in French.

"I am Marie Lecomte, at present truly miserable; but I go to rejoin my husband, else my heart will break. This confusion is so strange, so terrible to me. You are, then——"

"Mrs. Mortimer, whom I think my friend, Madame Faucher, named to you as a fellow voyager."

"It is you, then, Madame Mortimère? Oh, ciel! I feel moved to clasp your knees. I am now not alone; you will be my protectress. Is it not so? Le bon Dieu be praised! And mademoiselle?"

"Let me make known my pupil, Mademoiselle Isabel Baldhill—you will perhaps like to be presented to her parents; we shall henceforth be one party, I hope."

"I am saved, I am again restored to happiness," cried the volatile Frenchwoman with the sudden transitionary enthusiasm of her race. "The voyage so dreadful, so despairing to me is now absolutely nothing. I see myself restored to mon bon Antoine; he clasps me in his arms. May le bon Dieu reward you and that so admirable Madame Faucher!"

"Now, Isabel; here is a companion nearly of your own age. See what mutual value her society will be. She does not speak a word of English. Say a few kind words to her in French."

The pretty foreign face lighted up and the bright, dark eyes flashed as the English girl hesitatingly expressed the pleasure it would be to have her for a companion.

She clasped her hand with fervour—again and again repeated her gratitude for the lucky chance which had brought them together.

Mrs. Baldhill, after regarding the new acquaintance with one of her preliminary looks of investigation, was pleased to approve of the addition to their party.

"You've heard all about her, Mrs. Mortimer," she said. "I suppose you can be sure she isn't here with a false character? I don't care much about foreign young women on board ship without husbands—or with 'em either, for the matter of that; but this one looks good. I ain't often mistook about faces."

"My friend's knowledge of her family and antecedents is complete," said Marguerite in English, while the large roving eyes wandered from one speaker to the other with the wistful expression of a child. "And I never knew her at fault in any information she wished to procure. I will vouch for her."

"Then I'll chance it," said the good woman with her wonted decision. "You tell her she'd better keep with

us on the voyage; and there's a spare berth in that cabin of yours and Bella's—it's paid extra for; you might take her in; she ain't very big."

Again the cheek of the girl-wife flushed when Mrs. Baldhill's proposal was explained to her. She came forward and kissed the hand of that liberal personage, saying gravely: "My mother is a saint in heaven, madame, but God has not suffered me to be an orphan longer. You will experience my duteous gratitude and obedience."

"I believe you are a good little thing," replied Mrs. Baldhill, much surprised at the sudden burst of gratitude. "I'll have an eye on you on the voyage. She ain't so bad-looking, mind you, Joe, though she's a trifle weedy; but board ship's an awful place for flirting and carrying on. A young woman without her husband that can take care of herself in a big steamer can be trusted anywhere."

On the day of Marguerite's departure this letter was received by Mrs. Gordon:—

"MY DEAREST MARIANA,—You know you have always wished me to call you by your Christian name; it is in keeping with the unselfish kindness with which you and Mr. Gordon have ever treated me. I hesitate to go on, for I feel that you must condemn my present action—the leaving you for ever—alas! that it should be so—without warning; without even informing you of my movements or destination. It seems but a poor return for your most loving, indeed unexampled, consideration; but do not think me ungrateful, dearest Mariana—do not you or your husband harbour one thought of distrust in your hearts towards me, however appearances may go.

"Why, then, cannot I explain? you will naturally ask. I can only answer that I cannot—may not do so. You know that there has always been something mysterious about me—about poor madame—whom you and your darling children took to your hearts; how much that meant to me you can never know. The mystery *must* remain, may ever remain unsolved. In the far land whither I am going it is impossible that you

can hear of me, but I shall from time to time have means of knowing of your health and happiness; may even watch over the welfare of yourself and those dear to you as if I were the guardian angel said to hover over the loved forms of earth. Think that in spirit I do so, shall ever do so, in life, aye! and after death, if a return from the dark realm be possible. Adieu! sister of my heart, I can give you no advice, no counsel, save to be yourself as I have ever found you. So only can you best secure the happiness of the children of your love, of my love, of your husband, of him whom I regard as one of the noblest of mankind. Henceforth think of me, mourn me, if you will, as of the dead. If we meet no more on earth, I bid you and yours, in fondest love, in deepest grief, a last farewell.

"MADAME ——."

The consternation caused by the receipt of this disastrous news in the Gordon household can hardly be described. Mariana and the children wept and bewailed themselves. Hugh Gordon, more self-controlled, was yet disturbed from his usual composure. Had a death occurred, the unfeigned sorrow could hardly have been greater. The blow was so unexpected, so bewildering, Mariana declared, that she and the children would never get over it; madame had made herself so completely one of their household, was so essential a portion of their family life. She was a referee in all matters of doubt and difficulty. Her judgment was so just; her taste so unerring; her kindness so unfailing. With one exception, and only one, there never was such a woman. If she had not been dead they could almost have believed that her spirit had returned to earth again. For herself, she was broken-hearted. Rita and Alister were crying their hearts out: the whole family was left desolate. As for blaming her, poor thing, neither she nor Hugh could ever harbour an unkind thought in their hearts against her, under any circumstances. All the world might go wrong, but she, never! Doubtless she had reason—good reason for what she did, perhaps connected with her husband. She never

distinctly said whether he was dead or alive. No doubt she felt the separation as much as they did. What Hugh would do, either, she didn't know. She used to save him trouble in so many ways.

So Mariana ran on, weeping profusely from time to time, and consoling the children, who refused to be comforted. "No one would ever teach them like madame," they said, "or read to them, or play with them. Even their lessons were like play; she explained everything so nicely." Alister was very glad he was to go away to school; he could never bear to look at their schoolroom again now madame was gone. Rita said little but wept long and silently, with her hand in that of Mariana's. It was indeed a house of mourning.

Hugh Gordon was hardly less surprised than his wife at the sudden disappearance of her whom they had come to regard as likely to remain with them for long years. "I cannot imagine any sufficient reason," he said again and again, "for this sudden disappearance." She is not a woman, I would stake my life, to have any disagreeable secret connected with her life; yet, had it been otherwise, surely she would have confided in us—in us who she knew would have done anything to serve her. Putting her flight in connection with that disreputable Frenchwoman who attacked her here, if it were not for her letter one might have supposed that she had been kidnapped and carried back to France. Such things have happened within my own knowledge. But for what object? She is not the possessor of a Monte Cristo treasure; nor has she injured any one in her life wilfully, I could swear. Here is this letter telling us that she has gone away of her own free will. There was always, as she says, a mystery about her. Most true, and we cannot solve it. But I never regretted the absence of any human creature, not a relative, so much before. We must bear it with fortitude, Mariana, though I do not wonder that you are inconsolable."

"Inconsolable, I should think so," replied she; "what will become of the children? Alister had better go to school; he will never submit to be taught by another woman; he deferred to her, but he never will to any one

else. And Rita, of course we must get a governess for her. But who to get, or how, I cannot imagine. She will be spoiled for any one else and will hate her next teacher. Madame took them off my hands so well. Then she was the most charming companion—the most thoughtful, wise friend. I am not very wise myself, I know, and I feel as if my rod and my staff were gone."

A considerable change in Hugh Gordon's household was caused by Marguerite's departure. Alister was sent to school; a governess was quickly provided for Rita. She was accomplished, she was used to teaching, she was suave of manner, but she did not replace dearest, lost, lamented madame, as Rita used to say twenty times a day. The house was more lonely when Hugh Gordon was away in town—the evenings less cheerful, even when he was at home. No one could have imagined that such a change could have been made in so short a time.

"It seems wonderful how we could have got on," said Mariana, "when we were first married, without her. I am sure we find it difficult enough now—though I do not know why it should be so. I feel so stupid in conversation now that we have her no longer to help us out. I really do pity you, my dear husband!"

"Mariana," said Hugh Gordon, taking her hand and looking fondly into her face, sad with the innocent, unfeigned sorrow that so rarely survives childhood, "I firmly believe that you are the most unselfish, soft-hearted woman alive. But you do yourself injustice. You are sufficient for my happiness. I am quite satisfied with my good, loving little wife. True, we both feel a genuine diminution of cheerfulness now that Madame has gone away and left us. She certainly was the rarest combination of tact and talent that I ever encountered. She came and vanished like a being from another sphere. Like you, I feel a terrible blank in our daily life. But we must bear our misfortune bravely, and fill up the gap as best we may with mutual love and service. We have all that is considered necessary for happiness. Let it suffice us."

CHAPTER XVIII

HENCEFORTH all was novel, wondrous, but in a sense healthful for the soul of Marguerite Gordon, widowed and childless as she felt herself to be. The breath of the ocean, the marvels of the mystic deep, the unwonted social world in which she lived—all these had a salutary effect both upon mind and body. Her health had of late improved in a wonderful degree. She felt, for the first time for years, a measure of strength and elasticity nearly akin to that of her lost youth and early womanhood.

Being one of the few English passengers who were able to converse easily in their native tongue with the captain and officers, she found herself treated with marked distinction. Mr. Baldhill was known by the returning colonists, of whom there are always some to be found upon the Peninsular and Oriental or Messageries Maritimes lines, to be a man of great wealth, of high character, and considerable political influence in his own colony. Her own appearance and manners were such as entitled her to rank high in any society in which she might find herself. On all these different grounds, the tall lady in mourning who was known as Mrs. Mortimer, and who was one of the Baldhills' party, found herself to be, without effort, deferred to in all ways; elected by common consent to be one of the leaders of that heterogeneous, chance-gathered, but interesting community formed by the passenger list of an ocean mail steamer.

She enlarged her circle of acquaintance gradually, discovering, as do all passengers on sea possessed of tact and sympathy, that a reasonable number of congenial persons may there be found. By degrees the names and occupations, characters and dispositions of the majority of their fellow voyagers were disclosed. No place is more favourable than a ship for the unravelment of mystery—the dissolving of reserve. If the habit of the individual tends to isolation, it is rare that some one on board does not possess a key, by hearsay or actual knowledge, to partial or complete

enlightenment. Thus, while the home that she had left was disorganised by her absence, *Le Caledonien*, the show boat of the Messageries Maritimes, having for her commander a distinguished officer of the French navy, with all appointments to match, was speeding along her ocean path. She held her course through the Straits of Bonifacio, past the snow-covered peaks of Sardinia, fretted silver against a sapphire sky, and before the fourth day the passengers were within sight of the armed ramparts and frowning bastions of Malta.

Each day at sea had apparently aided the restoration of Marguerite's health. Whether there was a special virtue in the wave-kissed breeze, whether the consciousness of having fulfilled to the uttermost the demands of duty stilled the turmoil of her mind, or that unfamiliar surroundings prevented any return of the old pain, she could not herself tell; but such was the marked improvement in her general appearance that Mr. Baldhill was moved to remark to his wife:

"Whatever's come to Mrs. Mortimer since we left Marsells I can't think. I never saw any woman alter that quick for the better in all my born days. Haven't you noticed it, missis? Never mind your cap, you're not such a bad-looking old woman without one," said Mr. Baldhill gallantly. "Why don't you ask that little Frenchwoman to alter it for you? I saw her tinkering up one for Miss Sharpe, and she made the old girl look like a four-year-old. But haven't you noticed how handsome Mrs. Mortimer's a-growin'? Why she's furnishing every day! I'd no notion she'd such points in her. She'll be the best-looking woman in the ship directly."

"Well, now you put it in that way, Joe, I do think she's a deal improved and altered since first I saw her. She speaks more like an Englishwoman, and don't seem a bit like a foreigner, does she? She goes sounder—I mean she ain't near so lame—and she's took off that shade she used to wear over one eye. She can't see out of it, I believe, but it looks just the same as the other. She's getting fuller in the figure too. If I was on my oath I couldn't swear she was the same

woman I seen that day I answered the advertisement at that French lodging house."

"It beats me anyhow I look at it, and I've considered a bit over it, I tell you," said Mr. Baldhill. "I've seen young girls lay on condition and all that when they came from school to a station in the country, and had fresh air, lots of milk and butter and fruit—all as they could fancy. I remember when I was managing Tumbangah—old Major Delamere's place. His eldest seemed to change from a tall slip of a girl into a woman all between haytime and shearing. And what a grand one she growed into, didn't she? But this is quite and clear a different case. If there was any rhyme or reason for thinkin' so, I'd 'most believe she'd been acting a part before."

"She might alter her clothing or her hair, or her colour," said Mrs. Baldhill, fixing her shrewd eyes into vacancy, as if interviewing a possible applicant; "but she couldn't alter her flesh and blood, and there's a change in that. Anyhow, I'll bet my last velvet gown against your fifty pounds, Joe—that one you got me in Paris—that there's nothing wrong about her, and I can't say more than that, can I?"

Mrs. Baldhill was not by any means gaudy in her apparel or extravagant in milliners' bills; but there were two items in which she allowed herself latitude—these were caps and velvet dresses. Of the former she had a varied assortment, suitable, in her opinion, for different portions of the day and all situations of life. Arrayed in one of the velvet garments, she had once been told that she resembled a portrait of Anne Boleyn, an innocent insincerity which continued to afford her satisfaction for many years. She did not, in a general way, permit comic allusions to these sacred robes; when, therefore, she offered to risk such a wager, Mr. Baldhill felt that her nature was deeply stirred.

"No, nor me either," assented Mr. Baldhill, with apparent inconsequence. "I'd never dream of thinking there's anything crooked about Mrs. Mortimer; it ain't in her. Any one who's seen human nature, rough and smooth, as you and I have, can draft out the straight-goers by the very looks of 'em. There she is now,

a-sittin' as quiet as you please with Bella, and making Marry Lecomte read a French book to 'em. She's never idle, that woman; she never talks to anybody a'most, except the captain and a few of the passengers, and not overmuch to them. It's my opinion she had a rough turn just before she left; but she's come to the right shop to be cared for a bit," continued Mr. Baldhill. "Every man in the ship would do anything for her, and there ain't a woman as has a word to say against her, as is more wonderful still. And look at them two young things there." He pointed as he spoke to where the French lesson was going on. Marguerite had been working hard to imbue her pupil with *les nuances* of the fastidiously elegant language of France, which she lacked. She was grammatically sound, and could converse fluently, but an occasional provincial rendering was apparent. To correct this deficiency Marguerite caused Marie Lecomte, a Parisian by rearing, whose dainty intonation was singularly pure, to read aloud improving French books. At this particular moment, Isabella having failed to catch the delicate sound required, Marie had jumped up and recited the lines with appropriate action. Upon Marguerite's urging the Australian girl, unused to recitation and not by any means given to gesture, to do the same, the situation became so comic that all three performers burst into hearty and unaffected laughter. Marguerite, indeed, paused when she heard her own voice, so rarely attuned to the comic pitch. It came upon her like a recollection of a former state of existence, when she had laughed last and with whom.

It was soon announced that the time admitted of a night's stay at Malta. Most of the passengers preferred merely to roam about the strange old-world town, which still survives, where De Beaumanoir and L'Isle Adam held stern sway, and returned to the ship. Mr. Baldhill, however, did not do things in this way. "We've been cooped up long enough to enjoy a night ashore, and we'll have one. *The Caledonian* ain't a bad boat, but the land's the land. I'm a deal comfortabler on shore, wherever it is. Mrs. Mortimer, we'll take a carriage directly after lunch, and see whatever there is

to be seen on the 'run'—I mean the island. It ain't a very big one. Would you like to go?"

"Very much indeed, Mr. Baldhill. To me this is a delightful experience. I have heard and read much about Malta. I long to verify some of its traditions."

"You will like to see, then, the viper that bit St. Paul," said Marie Lecomte. "Is he yet alive? I do not absorb miracles."

"I'm afraid he's dead long ago," said Marguerite; "but, Isabel, we can find 'where two seas met,' and other places of interest. Will you not be delighted to go there?"

"Indeed I shall," said the girl eagerly.

"All right," said the father, "we'll do it; won't we, missis? There's a lot of things well worth seeing, and now Bella's getting on so well with her French, I don't care what I do for her."

"It's all Mrs. Mortimer and Marie here," said Isabel; "I should have done precious little but for her and this good little Marie helping me. It makes me quite savage when I think what a beastly accent I have."

"Isabel, my dear, I think a more pleasing and scarcely less expressive adjective might be used by a young lady."

"Not so expressive, my dearest, dearest Mrs. Mortimer; but I won't say it if you don't like. We won't do anything she doesn't like, will we, Marie? We love her so, don't we? I feel as if Marie were a girl just like myself. What a little weed you are, Marie, to be sure!"

"Oueed? what is oueed—a bad flower, a poison plant? Is that what you call your friend so sincere—so devote, Miss Isabelle? I have pain for you!"

"You dear mite," cried out Isabel, putting her arms round the little woman's neck and lifting her by the waist as if she were a child. "I don't want to hurt your poor little pride. A weed in our country means a small, well-bred, pretty thing, not a great tall maypole like me."

The day was fine, the sky cloudless, the blue waters of the Mediterranean lay in restful beauty as they were rowed towards Nix Mangiare stairs. A "mistral" had suddenly arisen in the Gulf of Lyons, terrifying Marie Lecomte and paling the cheek of Isabel. But now, all

feelings of danger and discomfort had vanished. The happy girls were loud in admiration of the strangely novel appearance of all things that they saw. The drawbridge—"a real one with chains," as Isabel said—guarded by sentries, the long narrow streets, the tall houses with their overhanging balconies, gaily painted and ornamented—all were unfamiliar.

"It is like the front of a stage scene," said Isabel, clapping her hands; "I feel like a child at a pantomime. How deliciously strange everything is, to be sure. Look at those women, with dark mantillas, how graceful they look; just like Spaniards, don't they? Those must be priests, with broad hats and long cloaks. How many there are! And did you ever see such carts? They're all wheels and shafts. Look at the mules, too! And oh! what a regular palace of an inn, Mrs. Mortimer; are you sure we are not going to Government House by mistake?"

"It's all right, Dunsford's Hotel," said Mr. Baldhill, who had been there before. "I wish we could get masons in our country to work for the wages they do here; I'd soon have a house like this at Merradoolah. The missis and I'll order lunch and a carriage. You'd better get shown to your bed-rooms and make yourselves tidy."

"I must have a bath," said Isabel. "There's a stone one here, with porcelain sides, somebody said, you can swim in. Fresh water's a treat after that sticky salt stuff. We'll be in first-rate trim after that for seeing the sights. I feel quite ravenous for some fruit. Next to that I should have liked to see the Knights of Malta. Isn't it a pity one can't?"

"Are they dead?" said Marie, so naturally that they both stared at her. "I was not sure. I have heard about them all my life."

"My dear Marie," said Marguerite, "we must buy a history of Malta; Isabel and you must read it by turns between here and Alexandria; and now, if we are to dress for lunch and our travels, I must send you to your bed-rooms."

After dinner a carriage drove up, which, with a little squeezing, took the ladies inside, Mr. Baldhill mounting

on the box and directing the driver, who, fortunately, spoke English which was not too much broken to be intelligible.

The afternoon was glorious; the younger women were in wild spirits, and Mrs. Baldhill serenely cheerful, while Marguerite, not without an effort, surrendered herself to the influence of the hour.

The Governor's palace was the first place visited. Isabel was perfectly frantic with delight as the little party roamed through the armoury, face to face with the effigies of Grand Masters of the once mighty order of the Knights of Malta.

"Is it not wonderful to think," she said, "that this very palace should have been built by one of these long-dead warriors? How charming it is to recall historic days of romance! That's where we are at such a disadvantage in poor dear Australia. We have no building older in Sydney than St. James's—an old, square brick church."

"And a very good one too, my dear," said Mrs. Baldhill. "Shows Governor Macquarie thought about religion the first thing. Don't you run down your own country, Isabel, for I can't bear it. I was born there, and you too. All the best of our life's been lived there, and all we've got came out of it. So, don't look down on the old place, like some foolish women that I know, that turn up their noses at the country that's made them and theirs."

"I never had any feeling of that sort, dearest mother, and you know it," said the girl, kissing the old lady heartily and resoundingly, to the manifest envy of the other sightseers. "I wouldn't be such a snob; would I, dad? But I shall miss my old castles all the same on the Warra Warra."

"My little girl will never have a hard thought or a hard word for the country that her mother and dad was born in, and that finds the money for all this kind of thing," said Mr. Baldhill quietly. "I know her better than that."

Isabel smiled up at him with her frank, truthful, though, it must be confessed, occasionally rather saucy countenance.

"No fear, dad! Oh, Mrs. Mortimer, is that perfectly correct? Let's ask Marie."

"Madame Lecomte, *Je vous prie est-ce que l'expression 'il ne me fait peur' parfaitement comme il faut?*" inquired Isabel, with great apparent deference.

"*Mais oui,*" said the little Parisian. "*C'est très élegant. Je le crois. Ah! méchante que vous êtes, vous me trompez. Il y a un soupçon d'argot, n'est-ce pas?*" she continued, having with national quickness observed the smile upon the faces of the questioner and Marguerite.

'You are a naughty girl, Isabel," said Marguerite; "I'm afraid I shall never break you of slang expressions, to which I have the deepest dislike."

"I assure you, Mrs. Mortimer," said the laughing disputant, shaking her fair brow, "that slang is extremely fashionable and most used in the best circles. We had a young lady in her own right at our school, niece to a Duke, and all the rest of it. You should have heard her language. It would make your hair stand on end, I can tell you."

"Then she was essentially vulgar, in spite of her birth," said Marguerite. "I hope she was punished."

"They knew better than that," said Isabel; "she was the show girl of the school, not in appearance or manners or learning either; but think of old Miss Martingall being able to allude to 'Lady Anne Startillham'—such a splendid advertisement! She was very straight, too, only a little rowdy."

"My dearest Isabel, you are getting more and more unintelligible," said Marguerite. "Suppose we think a little of our surroundings. Look at the watch-tower among the vineyards, and the oxen treading out the corn. How unchanged the manners of the people seem since the Old Testament days!"

"Now you are vexed," said Isabel; "I think it must be this Maltese air that makes me bubble over with nonsense. I'm going to be as good as gold now, and I'll take notes of all these wonders for my journal. It will be such fun reading it over in hot-wind days by-and-by."

"That's my sensible, good, dear girl," said Marguerite; "she is never naughty for long, is she, Mr. Baldhill?"

"Only wants her head and a light hand," said that gentleman, who had been a great horse-tamer in his youth. "It's all skittishness and play-like. She ain't got a bit of vice about her."

"I hope not, daddy!" said the girl, looking at him affectionately. "It would break my heart to grieve you and mother seriously, wouldn't it now? let alone dear, patient Mrs. Mortimer. Besides it would be a bad example to Marie here; wouldn't it, Marie?"

Marie looked at the playful maiden with wistful, wondering eyes—as who should say, "*Ah! ces Anglaises! comment elles ont incroyables.*"

"Well, if you've done with your fun for a bit, you girls, we'll go to St. Paul's Bay," said Mrs. Baldhill. "I've always wanted to see that place, and the last time we were here we missed it."

"I know it," said Mr. Baldhill, "There's a little wine-shop—trattery, don't they call it, driver?"

"*Trattoria,—si signori,*" echoed the Maltese, showing his white teeth. "*San Paolo, San Paloala!*"

"He knows it well enough, I'll be bound," said Mr. Baldhill. "You drive there, Marco, and I'll give you a glass of wine coming back."

The day was perfect. No wind ruffled the deep as they ascended the slight elevation and looked down upon the calm waters of the bay. The young people, always keen of appetite, had brought cakes and fruit. Mr. Baldhill had insisted upon everybody taking a glass of the country wine at the trattoria, and as they gazed at the strange foreign buildings which bordered the road, and marked the stillness of the warm air, they lapsed into quiet speculation as to the exact locality of the stranded bark of the apostle.

Mrs. Baldhill produced her pocket Bible and read as follows:—"And when it was day they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek, with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust the ship. . . .

"And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. . . .

"And when they were escaped then they knew that the island was called Melita. . . .

"And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux."

"What a wonderful thing it seems," said the old lady, closing the book reverently, "that we should be starting in a ship now for Alexandria just as St. Paul was then, ever so many hundred years ago, and to think this is the very place. There's the creek, sure enough. Don't you think so, Joe?"

"It looks like it," assented Mr. Baldhill; "that sandspit divides the bay into halves; and when the tide's running in it seems for all the world as if 'two seas met.' I believe it's generally supposed to be the place."

Isabel's frolicsome spirits seemed to have left her. "Surely it must be the place," she said softly; "something tells me so. What an exquisite spot! I feel as if I could pray here, and fancy St. Paul, calm and fearless, telling the sailors and the Roman soldiers that they would be saved! I should like to stay three months on the island, as he did."

"Can't be done this time, my dear," said Mr. Baldhill, not ironically, but as if he might entertain the idea in the future. "Some day, when wool's up, you can stay a year here if you like."

The drive back in the cool of the evening was a ramble through fairyland. Marguerite and the girls drank in the unwonted strangeness of the Moorish-looking balconies and lofty garden walls, with shrubs and flowers straggling over. Silence succeeded to the gay interchange of badinage, and when they stopped before the church of St. John, a certain undefined tone of sadness had communicated itself to the party.

"Oh! what a glorious temple!" said Isabel, as they entered the vast building, and half-absorbed, half-noted the beauty of the surroundings. The delicacy of the work in silver and marble, in which the shrines are chiefly constructed; the height, grandeur, and lavish ornamentation of the wondrous halls, all tended to silent awe and admiration.

"And here sleeps Guy de Rohan!" murmured Isabel softly, as she lifted her light foot reverently from a marble slab with a brass-lettered legend and armorial bearings; "killed in hand-to-hand conflict with the infidel. Ah me! if only one of those noble knights could come walking down the aisle! In this very church he prayed. How sad and solemn it all seems. And here again,"—pointing timidly with her parasol—"lie the bones of Raoul de Bracy, slain in the same battle! I wonder if he was the same de Bracy that was with Bois-Guilbert, that splendid, wicked Templar in *Ivanhoe?* It seems mean to be alive and merry when all these heroes are dead. Surely it can't be wicked to pray for their souls, Mrs. Mortimer? Marie devoutly believes that it is proper. Don't you, Marie?"

"*Mais oui!* I pray chiefly, however, for myself and the soul of my sainted mother. For her, alas! it is all that I can do."

"Without going deeply into questions of no present advantage, my dear, I would say that all prayer, being the heart's adoration of the Supreme Being, whether for one's own spiritual benefit or that of others, must be healthful for the soul. Unselfish, earnest prayer for the welfare of others can never be wholly in vain or barren of blessings. They are vouchsafed to those who pray, as well as to those prayed for. But hark to the music! It has just commenced."

As they walked along the marble floor, in close contiguity to the gallery, they became sensible that the church was becoming gradually tenanted by others beside themselves.

The effect of music in these vast cathedrals is indescribably grand. In pairs, in small groups, the people come. A solitary worshipper steals in—worn with this world's troubles, heavy with sorrow, perchance laden with guilt. Each penitent throws himself upon his knees. The mourner sobs as with a breaking heart.

At the solemn chant all heads are bowed. Then every voice is raised in a sad, wild, appealing cry, as it for mercy. Again the music swells, the deep, measured roll of half-chant, half-recitative comes from the unseen

choir, as who should say, "Rest in faith, troubled hearts, believe, repent, ye shall be saved." Then streams out again the wild, wistful chorus of the humble, the proud, the penitent, the desperate, all mingled in the half-ecstasy, half-agony of the "Miserere."

Such was the novel spectacle, such the thrilling volume of sound which greeted the wayfarers as they stood motionless amid the kneeling crowd of worshippers.

"Oh!" said Isabel at length, "I feel I must pray. Do let us kneel, mother: we have all something to ask for. Why not say our prayers here, in this beautiful house of God?"

Mrs. Baldhill looked half-reproachfully at her child, and then observing the rapt, unconscious feeling of awe and veneration with which her features glowed, said softly, "We have all much to pray for, darling! Let it be as you wish."

They sank upon their knees. Once more the deep notes of the organ rolled in volume, the sweet, clear tones of the choir, as of a seraph band, floated above them, and echoed through the vaulted roof, as the pilgrims journeying to a far land prayed all silently and with bowed heads for a certain space. Then they arose and, without notice or obstruction, mingled with the decreasing worshippers who left the cathedral, Mr. Baldhill not omitting to place a substantial donation in the receptacle at the entrance.

They walked to the carriage in silence, revolving thoughts too deep for utterance. Acknowledging the need for prayer, which always lay deep in her inmost heart, Marguerite had unburdened her soul with profound humility and self-abasement. With the act of prayer for those whom she loved best, what a flood of regret—nay, well-nigh of remorseful feeling—rushed through her mind! It seemed to her as if there was a certain desertion in her going away. Here too, with new scenes, friends, feelings, all seemed changed. Even her hopeless sorrow had not remained unaltered. She was conscious of higher health and vitality, of a strangely renewed interest in life. How could these things be? Was her bygone life in reality past and

done with—dead, so to speak? And was she free to live again? Strange thoughts invaded her mind, unwelcome, unsought, but still flitting across the elastic threads of being. Had her husband not sought at least some ease of pain, of sorrow, in other ties? He had not permitted his grief to prey upon his quick and living manhood. Why should she refuse consolation of a like nature were it offered, as it might be in the changing life of a new world? Then she buried her face within her hands, and the tears welled from her eyes as she besought God that she might live and die true to the sacred vow of her youth.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN they reached their hotel Mr. Baldhill proposed a walk on the ramparts, the fashionable promenade. The situation rendered it breezy. The sea air was exhilarating. Isabel and Marie shuddered as they leaned over the iron railings and looked into fosses of abysmal depth. Century-old towers and batteries were around them which had awed the Moslem in the great days of the Knights. It excited their wonder to behold the green umbrageous trees, which, planted in recesses scooped out of the rock and filled with earth brought from Sicily, afforded shade and beauty in the wilderness of stone.

"By George," said Mr. Baldhill, "if here ain't a plate to the memory of poor young Scheberas, as died at West Maitland! That's what it says. I knew him well. Such a nice chap he was. Came down with his regiment and stayed at Merradoolah for a month once. To think of us coming across his epitaph, or whatever they call it, here!"

"I remember him," said Mrs. Baldhill. "What a nice, gentle, peaceable creature he was. I was sure he wasn't strong; he used to cough at night, and mornings too. I was that fond of him—like my own son. Ah!

and he's gone too!" Here the mother's heart gave way, and her tears flowed fast. "Poor boy! His mother grieved over him, I'll be bound. Well, we always told him to make himself at home with us, and he did."

The unsated girls proposed to walk along the romantic winding road which follows the course of the harbour. Narrow in places, precipitous, red-soiled, it recalled Isabel's early associations.

"It's very like the South Head road; isn't it, mother? with the sea on one side and so many turns and twists and ups and downs. I thought that young officer on the Arab horse was going to ride over us; he had hardly time to pull up."

"Well, it's not so very unlike," said Mr. Baldhill; "but though there's the sea, all the same there's no country here—nothing but the bare rock. I wonder anything grows at all. They have carriages here too. Not many, though."

"I suppose this is the fashionable drive in the afternoon?" said Isabel. "I wish the ladies didn't muffle themselves up so. I can't see what they're like. But I'm getting dreadfully hungry. I'm sure it must be nearly dinner time."

Dunsford's Hotel was celebrated for its *cuisine*, and on this occasion the management was stimulated by the presence of the fabulously rich Australian Milor (who had provinces of his own and gave away villages to his favourites—like an Eastern Sultan; such was the free translation of Mr. Baldhill's property and possessions), and produced a dinner which surprised Marguerite and equalled Isabel's sanguine anticipations.

How the girls laughed and feasted! How Marie "carried a toast" to the health of her benefactor and benefactress, whom she would ever regret to leave! How Mr. Baldhill insisted upon Marguerite pledging him in at least one glass of champagne! How Mrs. Baldhill confessed that she had not enjoyed a meal before since they left Euston Square; how Isabel vowed that she would come back to Malta for her wedding trip if ever she was married, of which she was doubtful! All these things may have been faithfully chronicled in that

wondrous journal of hers, which no one ever saw; but it is nevertheless true that much of what is here glanced at took place in truth and earnest. And did they not afterwards—Isabel insisting thereon—sally forth to the "place" where in the fair moonlight they beheld crowds of the gay Maltese indulging in song and dance, or sitting at little tables with coffee and ices before them, the whole butterfly population wearing the aspect of a people who dwelt where sorrow was not and care was forbidden to come. In spite of Marguerite's remonstrances, the whole party finished up with ices—Isabel's particular weakness—and then, tired out with the frolic and excitement of the day, the happy girl dragged her tired limbs into the chamber prepared for her and Marie, and sank into the dreamless slumber which only the young and innocent are privileged to enjoy.

Next morning, after breakfast, they were strolling down to the harbour of Valetta, Isabel rather pensive at leaving that "dear, delightful Malta," as she called it, when——

"What a horrid thing it is to be a girl!" she suddenly cried. "If it was not for that stupid mistake of Nature Marie and I might take a boat and sail away from Nix Mangiare Stairs, just like Master Midshipman Easy and Mr. Gascoigne did, and go to Sicily and have adventures. Oh, see what we lose, and then we're told to be good and behave nicely, which is more exasperating still. I suppose it's the reaction from so much pleasure, but I feel dreadfully discontented this morning."

"Well, but what would old dad do without his little girl?" said Mr. Baldhill, as if he fully expected her to call for a boat and set off incontinently. "I don't say it ain't vexing sometimes; but we must all take what God sends us in His world, and do our duty, pet. Mustn't we, mother?"

"Wait till we get to that other place, Alexanderer," said Mrs. Baldhill. "I daresay there's something to see there. You mustn't be thinking, Bella, of what no lady ever does—that is a lady—gallivanting about by herself. You wait your time, and you'll be able to do pretty well all you've a mind to. We ain't checked you that much yet; have we, dearie?"

"You're all too good to me—a great deal too good; that's what makes it so hard to bear," said the beauty. "I shouldn't have any satisfaction in running away, should I?"

At this stage of introspection and vain regret the stirring sounds of the drum and fife, that warlike music so long held sacred to the British army, smote upon their ears. "Oh! here come the soldiers," Isabel exclaimed; "do you remember the last time we heard a band? It was in that nice little village in Kent. It makes one think of home again."

"You're like all women, my dear, you turn from sailors to soldiers, and back again, as quick as a bird flying," said her father. "Well it's a fine sight, and one that always stirs my blood, and makes me feel myself an Englishman all over—here they come!"

"Ah, *ciel*," said Marie; "*que ces sont des braves hommes—Voilà!*" And she began to hum—

"Polichinelle a le beau cousin
Qui est un jeune militaire."

The little party drew up on the side-walk as two companies of the 70th Regiment—then quartered in Malta—marched by.

"Ah!" said Mr. Baldhill, "they're men, ain't they? Look at their square shoulders and steady bearing. There's something about the regulars after all. I always feel proud of being an Englishman, though I was born in Australia—it's all the same when I see my country's soldiers and sailors. They are twice as big as your countrymen, Marie; ain't they?"

"*C'est le cœur qui fait le grenadier*," said Marie, holding up her head, putting up her parasol, and imitating the Zouave step.

This made every one burst out laughing, Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill confirming the joke when they had been furnished with a translation. Marie's martial ardour had, however, been roused, and an animated discussion took place with reference to the respective merits of French and English soldiers, in which Isabel took part, and which lasted until they quitted the historical stairs,

Isabel purchasing ever so many pottles of strawberries and baskets of oranges from the dark-eyed, smiling damsels who thronged the flags.

Le Caledonien had her steam up; there was no time to spare. Ten minutes after they set foot on her spotless deck they were quitting the harbour of Valetta and speeding under a full head of steam towards the city of Iskender.

Le Caledonien reached Alexandria sufficiently late next morning for all the ladies to be up. Indeed early rising was now the fashion, and some little laughing and talking took place in those somewhat tedious intervals when the bath-rooms were occupied. The sun was an hour high as they steamed past the Mole lighthouse, the ancient Pharos, into the western harbour. The Pasha's palace was in sight, and for the first time Marguerite's eyes and those of her youthful companions looked upon the "havoc and splendour of the East," as Isabel called it, quoting from *Eothen*, which she had borrowed from an agreeable Indian subaltern. They all with one accord declared for a shore breakfast, and were about to disembark, when Isabel suddenly exclaimed, "How long shall we stay in this lovely place?"

"Just as long as it will take to go down the canal. If we had not wanted to repair one of the steam-pipes we should not have come here at all."

"Oh, dad, dad! you don't say that; and here I have been reading all about Egypt and the Nile, and the wonderful temples, and then to skip it all like that—it is too bad. Can't we stay here a month and go up the Nile in one of those lovely boats? I shall break my heart if we have to go straight on. It will only take another thousand, perhaps less."

"Well, pet!" said Mr. Baldhill, arranging his hair thoughtfully, and looking as if it was a most reasonable and thoughtful proposal, "I don't see as we're in that hurry to get home that we need lose any of the best sights by the way. There's nothing to do when we get there but live, that I know of, and we can do that just as well, and better, here. What do you say, mother?"

"All places are just the same to me now," said the old lady sadly. "If *he* had been alive it might have been different. It will be a sort of school teaching to Bella, bless her heart! that she ain't likely to get any other way. I don't mind, if we can get the luggage out."

"I can manage that, I think; but how about little madame here?" turning to Marie. "How's your husband to get on without you?"

"He has waited so long, he may well wait a little longer," said the volatile Parisian. "We shall neither of us die of grief, *ma foi;* and Antoine will not grudge his *petite* this little bit of life. I was *triste* enough before I met you, parents and sisters that you all are to me."

"That's a brave girl. I'll make it up to you and Antony, if that's his name. There's a deal to be done in the wool line if he's sharp and a good judge. Well, we'll wait now and take our boxes with us, that's the idea. Then we'll be independent like."

"Oh! you dear, precious old dad!" said his wicked spoiled child. "I do believe you're the very best father in the whole world." And here she threw her arms round his neck and embraced him with such fervour that the Lascars and such "heathenesse" as had managed to get on board looked scandalised.

However, Bella and her father were not in the habit of considering other people's opinions to any great extent, having always been in a position to do precisely as they pleased, or with such limitations only as are imposed upon those enviable personages to whom "money is no object." Thus after a short conference with the chief officer, the whole party found themselves on shore and *en route* to the principal hotel, with all their worldly goods and chattels well under supervision.

"Is not this perfectly enchanting?" said Isabel, as they sat down to their breakfast in a lofty, cool room, with a balcony opening from it, into which the excited girl kept continually rushing, returning to her companions with tales of fresh wonders and splendours of the East.

"Oh, look at that lovely darling of a white horse that the old Turk is riding past! His tail is actually

dyed pink; how he holds it up, and what a lovely, lovely head he has—how I should like to have him; wouldn't all Sydney girls envy me! I *will* have an Arab to ride some day; and the great ugly black slave that rides behind him, I suppose he's a slave though he looks prouder than his master, he has a bay horse, and a regular beauty he is!"

"The slave, pussy, or his master?" queried Mr. Baldhill. "You'd better mind or the old chap might take it into his head to buy you; they used to do such things once, I believe, long ago."

"What!" said Isabel standing up, and throwing her head back, while her eyes flashed scorn and defiance. "Fancy any one buying me! a pretty bargain they'd have too, my word! But that was in the time of the *Arabian Nights*, Pappy. We English people have altered all that, and quite time too."

"So you call yourself English?" said Mr. Baldhill, with a twinkle in his eye. "You're a regular Currency lass, you know, born in Paramatta, where your mother was born before you."

"Of course I do," said the youthful patriot. "All Australians are English to the backbone, and we'll live and die under the old flag. Whether we're born in Sydney or South Devon, the blood's the same, and that's everything; don't you think so, Marie?"

"*Mourir pour la patrie*," sang Marie, who had caught the meaning of the argument. "Antoine and I go back to *la belle* France, when we have amassed the fortune he goes to seek in your grand *pays*, Monsieur."

"I hope he'll do some good, for your sake, Mary," said the kind-hearted Mr. Baldhill; "and then he may go home or turn Englishman, whichever he likes best."

"Become an Anglais? *Nevaire!*" said Marie, looking like a tiny vivandière as she assumed a warlike expression. "I love you," she resumed rapidly. "I love madame, Isabel, *ma chérie*, and Madame Mortimère, who is *ange de Dieu*, but *le Gouvernement Anglais*, I *hate* it!"

"Quite right, Mary, stick to your colours; but it's queer, ain't it? that's just the feeling every Frenchman I ever met seems to have. I can't make it out. But

we must get to business. Mother, where are we to go next? Shall we stop here a day, and then go on to Cairo? There's something to see there, and we can take it easy at Shepheard's. It's a regular good, comfortable place, and he knows me. If we fancy going up the Nile in one of those big boats, we can get in a good dragoman, and he'll do everything for us."

"As we are here now, and all happy and comfortable together, I don't see why we shouldn't enjoy ourselves," said Mrs. Baldhill. "I'd like to see where the Israelites crossed over the Red Sea, poor things! and where Moses was picked up on the bank of the Nile, and ever so many things. We may as well do it all now; we shall never have a better chance. We can spend a month or two here, and then be back in Sydney when the cool weather sets in."

They sallied out after breakfast, and apparently there was no end, judging from Isabel's exclamations, to the fresh marvels which on every side presented themselves. They invaded the Pasha's palace, where they examined with curiosity the European furniture, and wondered at the tawdry ornamentation of the interior. The Pasha was building another palace, as usual, as if, in defiance of his ominously large national debt, he were resolved to indulge each and all of his many recklessly expensive tastes.

The Shoobra gardens were not left unvisited, and the whole party, after a long day's exploration, returned to their hotel charmed with their first experience of Eastern life, and sanguinely expectant of the joys of the morrow.

"Now," said Mr. Baldhill in the evening, as they sat in the cool, pleasant room revelling in the novelty of a shore dinner, "can you reckon up how many new things you have seen to-day, pussy?"

"Oh! about a thousand, I believe," said Isabel, who, having nearly concluded a satisfactory meal, had shown signs of betaking herself to her favourite station on the balcony. "I don't think I ever spent a happier day in my life; but this is nothing to what it will be at Cairo. First of all we must have a talk over what we have seen; mustn't we, Mrs. Mortimer? That will impress it upon our minds."

"I think it a very good plan, my dear," said Marguerite. "I am almost afraid that you see things a little too quickly, and conclude that you have thoroughly comprehended facts which you may not afterwards retain."

"Oh! I shall remember them, you may be sure. I will write ever so much of it down in my journal when we are on the Nile. Fancy sailing down—or rather up—that grand old river in a dahabieh; that's the correct name for a Nile boat, I believe. It will be delicious. But, *do* you remember us meeting that group of women to-day with their faces all covered up, and a sort of black funnel hanging down for them to breathe through? Wasn't it droll? I think it a first-rate idea, for one thing."

"Why is that?" said her mother; "would you like your face covered up?"

"Not I, indeed; but you don't see what I mean. The plain women would look quite as well as the pretty ones, and they can walk proudly along, with their heads up, knowing no one can tell the difference."

"That's a decidedly original idea of yours, Isabel," said Marguerite; "but I doubt if it compensates for the inconvenience. Our poor sisters there have a dreary life; their minds wholly uncultivated, their existence one long tyranny and imprisonment."

"These didn't look miserable by any manner of means; and we saw a few carriage loads of the Pasha's wives out for a picnic or something. They were full of fun, and screamed and larked like a lot of schoolgirls. They didn't look nearly as downhearted as the mother of a family in Australia who's lost her cook and doesn't know where to get another for a month. *She* doesn't laugh much, except on the 'wrong side of the mouth.' But that's the beauty of slavery!"

"My dear Bella," said her mother, "we shall have to take you back again if you talk like that. I'm afraid all this travelling won't do you any good, you get on so very fast. Approving of slavery and that Pasha and his fifty wives—I wonder at you, my dear!"

"He's got a hundred and twenty, my dear mother! Think of that! and what their milliners' bills must come

to! But there's no use being afraid of my knowing too much. Girls see all this kind of thing in books, only they're afraid to talk about it. That's the difference. Now, I'm not afraid of anything, am I, dad? I don't believe I should be any better for casting down my eyes and saying, 'How dreadful! what awful wickedness!'"

Here Isabel looked down, and put on a mincing expression of propriety so foreign to her usually fearless, truthful expression, that the contrast was irresistibly ludicrous.

Everybody burst out laughing. Even Marguerite could not help smiling, though she declined to approve of Isabel's unconventional frankness. "My dear Isabel, I hope you will learn by-and-by that young ladies are very properly restrained in society from expressing everything which they feel. They should not say things which they do not believe. But they are prevented by social laws from revealing every thought of the heart, pure and innocent as I know my girl to be."

"My dearest Mrs. Mortimer," said Isabel, good-humouredly, "you're always right about everything, so I suppose you're right about that too; but it's a terribly hard thing for me not to say what I think. Oh! listen to that. What possible noise can that be?"

The noise which they heard was a long-drawn, wailing sound, prolonged in a curiously high tone at intervals.

"That," said Mrs. Mortimer, "must be the cry of the muezzin calling the people to prayer. I think you can distinguish the first few words. The minaret of the mosque on which he stands cannot be very far from here. 'Allah il Allah,' it begins, and then comes a short sentence in Arabic, 'Prayer is better than sleep.'"

After a while each one, by attentive listening, could distinguish the opening words. At regular intervals the melancholy warning cry was heard. At the end of it the street dogs used to take up the chorus, and howl in unison. When one muezzin ceased another commenced. The effect was strangely solemn, even weird, amid the silent, unlighted streets.

"I don't know whether the Turks are more strict about their religion than we are," said Mr. Baldhill,

during a temporary cessation of the clamour; "but, anyhow, they ain't allowed to forget it."

"The air is quite pleasant now," said Isabel after a pause; "but I don't suppose there's anything to be seen outside."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Baldhill; "and this isn't a place to be walking about in after dark. There'll be a good lot of fuss and bustle getting away by the train to-morrow. I'd advise you and Marie to go to bed. You've gone about a good deal to-day, mind."

"I think I will, mother," said the girl, nestling her head for a while on her mother's shoulder. "I should like to sit out on the balcony for an hour and look at the stars; but that old muezzin's voice frightens me. So come along, Marie."

Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill having ensconced themselves in two large wicker-work lounges, seemed more inclined for contemplation or slumber than talk. Marguerite walked on to the balcony. She was restless and uneasy. As she gazed upon the stars in the cloudless heavens, and heard the unfamiliar sounds of the city, she felt strangely moved.

"This, indeed, is a new world of experience and sensation," she told herself, "into which I find myself propelled as by resistless fate. After all, how powerless are mortals against the fiat of destiny! But a few short years since, and how improbable, nay impossible, should I have considered it that I should find myself standing at this hour in this ancient Eastern land, with the silent stars above, with the sounds and scenes of this unknown city below me! I myself driven forth from all that I hold dear—ah! me, and beholden to strangers—kindly and generous as they are—for my very subsistence. How inscrutable are the workings of Providence! And yet, what can we do but submit! When one thinks of the wondrous march of events which these plains and waters have seen, of their influence for good and evil upon mankind, one can but rest, awe-stricken, to worship and to wait."

On the following morning the happy girls and their resigned elders railed away towards Grand Cairo, as the olden title of Haroun's city ran—Isabel almost mad

with joy at the prospect of meeting Ali the water carrier, Cogia Hassan, Fatima, and the Vizier in the streets, as she confidently expected. The shadows were lengthening as they reached Shepheard's, fortunate, through Mr. Baldhill's sagacity in telegraphing, in securing a suite of apartments. Airy bedrooms, a large salon, with a balcony from which the pyramids and half Egypt were apparently visible, a bath and ante-room, were all placed at the service of the Australian nabob of fabulous wealth who was going to spend a year in Upper Egypt and discover the source of the Nile if possible—such was the reputation which had preceded Mr. Joseph Baldhill of Merradoolah; and his habitually open-handed, not to say careless, style of disbursement did not tend to weaken the public conviction.

It was yet early for dinner, and nothing would content the insatiable Isabel but a donkey-ride, so the requisite number of long-eared steeds being produced—the great difficulty being to disentangle, or, as Mr. Baldhill said, to draft them out of the mob of asses and donkey-boys which was mustered before the hotel steps—Isabel and Marie rode proudly away accompanied by Mr. Baldhill, who regretted his stockwhip, but managed to keep order with a hunting whip, brought from England, with which he produced unexpected results amid the yelling, ragged throng.

Almost in front of the hotel was a "place" where a variety of recreations were indulged in by a various collection of races. There disported themselves the staid Englishman, the swarthy, vehement Italian, and the wily Greek, while Turks, and negroes, Jews, Egyptians, Germans, Americans all mingled in the warm dusty twilight, producing an impression of polyglot lineage and confusion of tongues hardly equalled since the building of Babel. The Cairene Turks struck the travellers as being more sulky and dignified than those of Alexandria. They declined to leave the road, and Mr. Baldhill was nearly trying the efficacy of a "back-draw cut" of his hunting whip upon the shoulders of one prodigiously turbaned elder who obstructed the way with a studied contempt for the infidels.

"I'd warm that old chap and teach him manners, even if I had to pay over a fiver in the Police Court," said Mr. Baldhill, sternly regarding the haughty Moslem; "but I don't know rightly how the case might go here. It's just as well to keep quiet abroad in a general way." However, he rode calmly close to the disciple of Mahomet, and rather shouldered him as he passed by, while he turned his head contemptuously away from the shameless Frankish women with their uncovered countenances.

"What a rude old man!" said Isabel. "I always thought there was something nice about Turks and Saracens. The Saracen Emir in *The Talisman* was quite delightful, and always a gentleman, I am sure."

"Oh! take care, Marie," she said to that young woman, who was sitting helplessly on her donkey, the which perverse animal in consequence pursued a devious course, and had to be brought back with ferocious threats and blows by his proprietor. "Look at the string of camels loaded with firewood; take care they don't scratch you off. Wasn't it Zobeide that pretended a camel driver scratched her face, when somebody bit a mark in it? Oh, dear! I wish I had brought my *Arabian Nights* with me. It would be quite a guide-book here."

The twilight deepens as they ride home to their hotel. They see a marriage procession pass by; a boy of eighteen seated in a red saddle on a white donkey, and a crowd of disorderly natives. He does not look happy as the tom-toms and stringed band, ingeniously discordant, break into a clamour intended to represent festive melody. As the lingering night approaches the stars burn through her dusky ebon pall. Strange cries and sounds mingle together in one curious city hum by no means without a harmony of its own. A swarthy slave on a richly caparisoned Arab horse dashes recklessly past them, driving the foot people from side to side in the narrow street. The lamps in the small shops and cafés commence to be lighted. The streets become gradually deserted. As they near the hotel the great building, brightly illumined, looks like a palace. "What a day we shall have to-morrow at the citadel!"

says the vigorous Isabel. "Why, Marie, you look rather done up, child! Never mind, you shall have your dinner, and a night's rest. Oh! to think we are in Egypt! Egypt! Egypt!"

CHAPTER XX

THEY dismounted at the hotel steps, which were as usual occupied by a detachment of helmeted, hatted, and pugaree-wearing Britons in every stage of travel, passage, and purpose. Indian passengers, civilians, and soldiers on leave, brown of hue, sunken of cheek for the most part, listless of mien. The emigrating Briton was quickly remarked. The fresh, ruddy complexion of the misty northern isles, the steady eye, the full robust habit which the fierce suns of far lands would so soon change, were plain to see. The wayfarers from the land which Mr. Baldhill represented were not so easily detected, being less homogeneous. Some, like himself, retained the rich colour and burly frame so eminently British. Others, again, bronzed and darkened by the desert suns of the great Austral waste, might well have been taken for Eastern travellers or men of long official Indian service.

A tall man—standing, indeed, some inches above the ordinary rank of loungers—had just moved courteously aside to permit the girls to pass, when Mr. Baldhill, stopping abruptly, said, "Why, Allerton, old fellow! don't you know your friends and neighbours? Have you heard whether they've had rain on the Warra Warra?"

"Eight inches, I believe," said the stranger, laughing; "but I really was puzzled to recognise my little friend Bella in the distinguished-looking young lady I see before me." Here he bowed low. "You had nearly passed while I was wondering who it could be. I'm so awfully glad to meet my old friends here. I trust Mrs. Baldhill is quite well. How does she approve of Egypt?"

"You come and dine with us in half an hour," answered Mr. Baldhill, pulling out his watch, "and she'll tell you all about it. They'll show you our rooms. Only to think of meeting Bruce Allerton here in this Never Never country, of all places! What a yarn we'll all have? You won't disappoint us?"

"I think not," answered the tall stranger; "only too happy to renew my acquaintance with Mrs. Baldhill and the young lady here, whom I suppose I shall not have the pleasure of kissing any more."

"I'm not a young lady; my name's Isabel Baldhill, if you haven't forgotten it. As to the kissing, you must ask mamma. I shouldn't mind, only there are too many people about at present, don't you think?"

"Just the same as ever," said Mr. Baldhill admiringly; "says whatever comes into her head. Well, we must get on. See you by-and-by. Come along, girls."

Isabel, who was considerably in advance of the others by the time they reached the sitting-room, rushed in exclaiming—"Oh! mother, mother! we've had such a delightful ride; but who do you think we met on the hotel steps? If you guessed for a month you wouldn't find out. Why, Bruce Allerton, our neighbour, and my old sweetheart, that used to be next door to us at Merradoolah. I thought he was an Indian officer at first; he did not know me either. Papa spotted him, though. Just fancy if we'd missed him. He's handsomer than ever."

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated Mrs. Baldhill with considerable emotion; "only to think of meeting Bruce Allerton here, above all things. Well, well! It seems but the other day he carried poor Syd home on his back that time he was thrown and put his ankle out. It brings all the happy old time back. He used always to stop with us going to Sydney and coming back. He never forgot to bring something for you, Bella, either, did he?"

"No, indeed but I'm afraid he's grown proud and stuck-up. He talked to me quite as if I were grown up, and said he supposed he mustn't kiss me now."

"No more he must, Bella; I'm quite shocked. You're nearly grown up now, you must remember, or

all the same ; isn't she, Mrs. Mortimer ? And you mustn't behave like a little girl any more."

"I don't intend to be grown up just yet," pouted Isabel ; "not till we've done Egypt, at any rate, and got back to Australia. Then I shall start fair and look this way. Isn't this the proper way, Mrs. Mortimer?" Here the spoiled beauty assumed a look of severe decorum. "Now I know you're going to scold me, Mrs. Mortimer ; you're going to meet the nicest man in the world at dinner."

Mrs. Mortimer smiled and shook her finger at her pupil, whose impetuous, affectionate nature, which occasionally led her into trifling indiscretions and breaches of conventional usages, was yet so genuinely kindly and innocent that a very slight amount of remonstrance sufficed.

"I wonder what Allerton's doing here?" said Mr. Baldhill to his spouse, in the confidence of ante-prandial dressing. "He's been away from home nearly three years now."

"Running about the world like the rest of you men, I suppose," said that lady. "It's time he settled down and got married, I should say, if he's ever going to do it."

"Well, he's steady enough, as far as that goes. Anyhow, I never heard anything to the contrary ; and he's been very lucky about those runs of the Company he bought seven or eight years since. He and his brother made a pot of money out of them. I don't see why he shouldn't amuse himself."

"That's all right," returned the lady. "I don't say he isn't all the better for seeing the world, like you and me, instead of sticking at home, as some of the Tatyara people have done, until they've no more notion of anything out of the colony than an old man kangaroo. But he's getting on now ; close on forty, if he's a day. If he isn't going to turn into a cranky, selfish old bachelor, with no one to think of and no one to care for, it's time he looked about him."

"Well, my dear, the right woman hasn't come along yet, or he missed her, and it turned him against the lot. It ain't every one as has had my luck—is it?" and here

Mr. Baldhill gave his wife a resounding kiss, which recalled the earlier days of their extremely fortunate union.

"Stuff!" said that lady, smiling however and rearranging her cap. "Every man ought to marry when the time's come. There's lots of good girls to be found with a little trouble, especially when a man's so good-looking and taking as Bruce Allerton."

When the little party sat down to table, the expected guest having arrived duly and punctually, it was evident that the meeting was looked upon by all concerned as a most favourable arrangement of destiny. He was formally introduced to Marguerite and Marie, to the former of whom he was markedly respectful and attentive, to the evident satisfaction of Mrs. Baldhill. Isabel for a short time seemed comparatively shy and constrained, but finally relapsed into the familiarity which their early friendship warranted. Perceiving from Marie's halting English that she had but lately commenced to use the tongue of perfidious Albion, he from time to time drew her into the conversation by means of a few Parisian allusions and quotations in her own language, which caused the little woman's eyes to sparkle with an added brightness.

Evidently he was the *bien-venu*. And indeed Bruce Allerton was a man of mark, there were few companies in which he would not have been esteemed. Handsome, athletic, "a picked man of countries," who had superadded the wider experience of travel to a cultured intellect and a naturally bold and adventurous nature, he was one of those rarely constituted individuals whom men respect and women admire. That he had not as yet found the guiding star of his life was possibly due to a fastidious temperament, an exacting taste, a too lofty ideal, or, as was rumoured in the land of his birth, to an early disappointment in love. However that may have been, and there were no available means of knowing with accuracy, it was generally a matter of surprise that Bruce Allerton, rich, distinguished, and independent of relatives, should have remained a solitary man. The owner of more than one fine estate, of several pastoral properties in the "new country," he was a model country gentleman and repre-

sentative man, of whom his countrymen were proud and his friends enthusiastic admirers. He was therefore in the interesting and flattering, if somewhat embarrassing, position of a public enigma or sphinx, defying the curious, grieving the sincere well-wishers, and generally furnishing an amount of personal remark much above the average allowance.

"Why can't you let the man alone?" Mr. Baldhill had demanded of one of his wife's acquaintances when the subject of Mr. Allerton's protracted and unreasonable celibacy had been mooted. "It's his own business, ain't it? There's no Act of Parliament to make a man marry when he's five-and-twenty! It ain't everybody that the collar fits when they do get it on, Mrs. Busfield."

This was in slight allusion to Mrs. Busfield's own helpmate, a man of easy-going temperament, who was popularly supposed to have had more than enough of his wife's unresting energy and determination to order his and other people's affairs according to her views of the manifest intention of Providence.

"Every gentleman with such a stake in the country ought to marry, and set a good example," said Mrs. Busfield with decision. "If all the men that are in good positions are to go rambling about the world till they're grey old bachelors, who's to marry our girls when they grow up, I should like to know? Half the young men haven't anything to marry on, and are not much to be proud of either if they had. And here, when a lovely house, a fine man, and one of the best properties in Australia are all going to ruin—yes, ruin, for we know what servants and flatterers are—for want of a proper mistress to look after them, I say it's a shame, Mr. Baldhill, and the Government ought to interfere."

"You'd better tell him so, Mrs. Busfield; or wait till you ladies have votes, and then you can bring in a free, secular, and compulsory Marriage Bill."

"It's all very well for you gentlemen to laugh," the irate dame replied; "but it's not right, and some of these days you'll see it the way I do."

Whether early marriages are in the main beneficial to

the individuals and to the State will probably remain an unsolved question for some considerable political period. As far as the result could be gauged, however, Mr. Allerton's free and untrammelled condition, which permitted him to wander at will over the kingdoms of the earth and inform himself as to the manners and customs of their various inhabitants, had tended to render him an interesting and entertaining personage. He had been everywhere and seen everything—at least, so it appeared to his friends and acquaintances at this eventful symposium. He did not volunteer information—indeed bearing himself after a very simple and unpretending fashion—but in reply to the questions showered upon him by Isabel and her father, rendered it apparent that few sources of knowledge had been withheld from him.

"And where are you bound now?" queried Mrs. Baldhill, as they strolled into the balcony and adopted favourable positions for overlooking the ancient city. "Back to England, or going to give poor old Australia a turn?"

"I thought I knew Egypt pretty well," said the insatiable wanderer; "but I fell across something the other day in the Museum at Boulak which made me think I should like to see Philae again. I am going to do the dahabieh business, and have a last look at the loveliest of spots. I have been waiting on the chance of getting a companion or two."

"We're going up the Nile," almost shouted Isabel; "in a dahabieh too. Why shouldn't we all go together? That is," she said, "if you don't object to so many—I mean to so large a party."

Mr. Allerton bowed low. "My dearest Isabel, nothing would give me greater pleasure. Surely you know that? Baldhill! what do you say, shall we join forces? It is a capital time of year. I'll hire myself out as interpreter for a pound a week and my rations."

"It would be the very thing," said Mrs. Baldhill; "that is, mind," continued that straightforward matron, "you're not to sacrifice yourself for our sakes. Two or three men by themselves are always more comfort-

able than when they've got a lot of women to look after."

"My dear Mrs. Baldhill! I'm enchanted at the idea of making the trip with old friends like yourselves; one gets a trifle tired of this lonely life. If you'll treat me as one of the family, my happiness will be complete."

"Well, if it's settled that way," said the hostess, "I shall be comfortable in my mind. I know we can leave all the dealing with the natives—Arabs and people—to you; and, of course, as you've been there before, it will be all plain sailing. It's the luckiest thing we fell in with you. Don't you think so, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Nothing could have been more fortunate than meeting an old friend under such circumstances," said Marguerite; "but I hope Mr. Allerton does not underrate the responsibility he has taken upon himself."

"I have travelled with Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill before now," said he with a look of reminiscent humour, "and carried Miss Isabel in my arms for hours. I don't know whether I could do so now. But we know each others' ways."

"You might have to do it again," said Isabel; "though I'm a good deal heavier than I was then. There's no saying what adventures we mightn't have before we get to the First Cataract. Oh, won't it be delightful! I think I shall write a book of travels when I get back. Fancy, *Nile Notes;* no, that won't do. *The Battle of the Nile*, by Isabel Baldhill. That would fetch the public. We can invent a battle with an alligator and some Arabs. I've set my mind on it."

"I hope you will read up your antiquities carefully," said Marguerite, "before you publish. All your mistakes would be picked out by the reviewers."

"Oh! it's quite easy, I'm sure, when you can say you've been there. I should contradict the reviewers, and stand on my dignity as a traveller."

"Let us hope that the public will be carried away by the style," said Mr. Allerton, "and not descend to petty details. Who is to do the illustrations?"

"Why, you are, of course," said Isabel. "If you sketch as well as you used to do—you must have improved, you know—it will be splendid. What sort of

a binding shall we have? Bronze with a gold band, I vote for."

"I vote for every one going to bed," said Mrs. Baldhill. "You and Marie are looking pale, and I'm tired out. So we'll all retire. Good-night, Mr. Allerton, you and Joe can settle all about the boat over your cigars."

And when the two men had finished their smoke and had a long confidential chat about Australian prospects and securities, the affair was definitely settled. Allerton was to hire a boat and crew, making all the necessary preparations, in which they were to share the expense. In a few days at farthest all would be ready for the stupendous expedition. In the meantime there was the Museum at Boulak to go over, besides half-a-dozen other world-famed sights in and around Cairo—Grand Cairo.

Mr. Allerton having made his appearance before the breakfast equipage was quite removed, and while an animated discussion was proceeding between Isabel and the rest of the party by turns as to where they should go for this particular day's entertainment, was admitted to the council.

"I should like above all things to ride up to the top of the citadel, and see where those dear Mamelukes were slaughtered, treacherously killed by that old tiger of a Pasha, Mehemet Ali—wasn't that his name? Wasn't it a cruel crime? Fancy them all riding in with their lovely Arab horses and splendid dresses, with their swords inlaid with gold—invited to a feast too—and then shot down in cold blood! No wonder Egypt is such a miserable country. The land is accursed."

"It was a well-planned, successful, and highly diplomatic murder," said Mr. Allerton smiling at the girl's vehemence as she stood with flashing eyes and upraised brow, a youthful embodiment of indignant virtue. It is generally held to have been an unnecessary crime. But the old Pasha was strongly of opinion that the fierce soldiery he obliterated were only awaiting their opportunity to destroy *him*. We must recollect that the battles of his stormy life were with foes who neither gave nor received quarter."

"I hope you are not going to justify wholesale murder— a horrible butchery I call it," said Isabel with a displeased air. "You must have grown hard-hearted, and I shall begin to hate you."

"Isabel, my dear," said the old lady, "do you know you're behaving very rudely to Mr. Allerton? You must excuse her, indeed she gets that carried away with all these foreign places and stories, she don't know what she says. I've a great mind to say you sha'n't go there at all, Bella!"

"Now my dear Mrs. Baldhill," said their guest, "I have ordered the donkeys, with a special white one for Isabel, and two well-known favourites for you and Mrs. Mortimer, to be here at half-past 9 o'clock. You must leave Isabel and me to fight out our battle at the citadel itself. I daresay one or other will give way before any great harm is done."

"You're so abominably kind—just like you used to be at Merradoolah," said the ex-naughty girl going up to him and taking his hand, "that there's no pleasure in quarrelling with you. I apologise to you and everybody. I daresay you're right and I'm wrong. We'll go and see the place anyway; won't we, dad? Then we'll know all about it."

"But these Mamelukes; who were they? Turks or Arabs?" said Marie. "And why were they killed? Perhaps they killed others before. All the world's history is full of death—kill, kill, kill. *C'est affreux.*"

"I'm sure I don't know, no more than the dead," said Mrs. Baldhill; "nor Joe either. All these dark people look to me as like as Chinamen. There's nothing to help you to tell one from another. You know of course, Mrs. Mortimer, all about them?"

"We are told," said Mrs. Mortimer, with an apologetic look at Mr. Allerton, "that they were Georgian and Circassian slaves, captured when young and trained as Turkish soldiers; handsome and brave, but cruel, disorderly, and most difficult to keep in proper discipline. So says the guide-book, I think."

"Quite correct, Mrs. Mortimer; they fought well but were perfect fiends for cruelty and outrage. They were also in the habit of shooting their officers and

demanding higher pay. Mehemet Ali had information of their being about to side with his enemies, and the situation being critical he resolved to close the long account—which he did effectually. All the same, I don't mind admitting that I always have mourned over the gallant, ill-fated band since I first read the story, so many a year ago, in our Australian solitudes. And now that I have made the *amende honorable*, Miss Baldhill, suppose we all mount our gallant steeds?"

"If you call me Miss Baldhill I'll stay at home," said Isabel; "but I know you only do it to tease me. I'll promise to be a good girl all day, till dinner-time at any rate."

A favourable start was effected, and the little party fared forth, through the half-deserted, ruinous dead city once the world-famous abode of Haroun the Magnificent, of Fatima and Zobeide, of viziers and caliphs, slaves and favourites, the cadi, the barber, calendars, and princes. Ah! me, what a procession of important personages was called up in the mind of Marguerite and Isabel as they threaded the narrow—and it must be confessed, unclean — streets. Overhead the lattices projecting from the tottering, half-decayed houses all but touched one another, shutting out the light of day. Blank walls, with secret-looking doors and postern gates, suggested mystery, melancholy, merriment or murder, as the case might be. All was strange and foreign of air, sealed up, hidden from the gaze as from the knowledge of the wondering strangers, though so familiar to their inner consciousness. Wondrous, immortal, haunting Past, by what magic art thou recalled in all thy glory, thy supernal splendour, thy woe unutterable!

"Can anything be more *bizarre* than this crowd?" said Allerton to Marguerite as, climbing the narrow, winding way that led to the citadel, they threaded the throng of Turks, Nubians, Egyptians, Europeans—all the mingled nationalities which Egypt, as of old, harbours. "Here we have the dominant Moslem, the lord and ruler of the land, grave, solemn, unrelenting, but having the conqueror's virtues, truth, courage, and justice, in the main. The subtle Greek, the downtrodden fellah;

the intriguing Frenchman, the careless, haughty Englishman. Comparatively recent races but of yesterday abound. Amidst and around them types ancient as the Pharaohs."

"Most wonderful, in truth," answered Marguerite. "It is to me a new world, and yet one in which I seem to have lived. Words cannot describe the gratification which it affords me to realise the dreams of youth. I gaze on living pictures, the tints and colouring of which through all the ages have never failed."

"It is delightful to meet with spectators so fresh and appreciative," said Allerton. "I have been here too often; the glamour of enjoyment has worn off. But look at your pupil's earnest eyes. Then our little Parisienne! her emotions are not deep, and she has little imaginative sympathy. I know the type well. But she has a child's fleeting emotional joy in the fair strange present. Mr. Baldhill and his wife, though culture has not been much in their line, are persons of exceptional intelligence, in whose minds these experiences will be stored up for future enjoyment."

"You have known them intimately in Australia, I gather?"

"Since I was a boy. Our 'runs,' or as you would say 'estates,' joined. More than once I was indebted to him for friendly counsel; indeed for more substantial assistance. He is a man of most generous disposition, of truly elevated and noble sentiment. Owing but little to education, he has attained a position of wealth, influence, and general esteem in his own country which people of far higher birth and surroundings have not always reached."

"That is the opinion I have formed of Mr. Baldhill," said Marguerite. "Nothing could have been more delicate and considerate than his conduct to me, as also his wife's. I have had everything to thank them for, but I am glad to have my idea confirmed."

"Rest assured of its correctness. No better, kinder woman ever was born than Mrs. Baldhill. I have seen much of the favourites of fortune and of rank, wealth, birth; but for genuine kindness, delicacy of sentiment,

and honesty of purpose, she might put many a fair aristocrat to shame."

"I endorse all you say fully; but, for the sake of argument, do you not think that inbred graces of manner and the subtle influences of intellectual training are indispensable adjuncts to the complete feminine character?"

"Only when they exist in addition to the fundamental virtues," said Bruce Allerton, with far more than his accustomed emphasis. "I grant you they are as the setting of the priceless jewel, embellishments that add an almost magical splendour. But when, as too often in life, we find that the setting supplies a false lustre, and that the gem that should radiate the burning glow, the star sparkle of quivering fire, is wholly wanting, give me then the uncut diamond, the rough red gold, the soft gleaming pearl, a thousand times before the spurious lacquer of a hollow civilisation. And now we have reached the outer gates of the citadel."

"Have you two been discussing the plagues of Egypt or the wanderings of the Jews all this time?" said Isabel's clear voice. "You've had time to go from the Desert to the Promised Land, I'm sure. Oughtn't we to look at the palace first though?"

Mr. Baldhill, flourishing his hunting whip, and his worthy spouse, who was tolerably at home in a saddle, albeit unused to donkey-riding, here came up at a fast amble, convoying Marie, who needed much guiding and occasional aid as being the most inexperienced of the party. It was decided to make a commencement by inspecting the mosque. The opportunity might not occur again. After some delay in properly disposing of the donkeys and their attendants they presented themselves at the door, and were accommodated with slippers, in order that their infidel feet might not defile the holy place.

"After we have done the mosque thoroughly," said Allerton, "let us go up to the terraced roof. The kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them must have been almost visible from it at one time. I have seen some extensive and varied landscapes; but taking into consideration the antiquity of the edifices, the

extent of vision in the clear air, the wonderful transactions of which this land has been the theatre, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it may be called the finest view in the world."

CHAPTER XXI

FIRST of all, everybody walked and skipped and ran over the marble-paved courtyard of the mosque—at least Isabel and Marie did, screaming aloud for gladsomeness, as they looked up at the lofty pillars of delicate golden-veined marble from the quarries of Syene.

"What a vast hall!" said Isabel; "it's like the 'Hall of Lost Souls' in *Vathek*. And what an enormous dome! There seems a perfect forest of pillars. How delicate the tracery is upon them; and what magnificent chandeliers! That must be the place where the Pasha's wives sit—don't you think so, Mrs. Mortimer?—all curtained in. They can see everything and nobody can see them. Quite a new idea; though why people shouldn't see you I can't make out."

"You ought to be thankful to be an Australian girl," said Marguerite. "You can go everywhere, see everything, and say what you please."

"And that's not a bad thing after all," said Isabel. "What do you say, Marie? You weren't allowed to cut about before you were married, though, were you?"

"A *demoiselle bien-élevée*," said Marie with a quiet smile, "in my country, is not allowed to see or to talk or to walk with any one save only her parents or her old aunt. *Ma foi!* she would be excommunicated if she did as you others—you English *demoiselles, par exemple.*"

"And I daresay you were brought up so good and innocent, Marie, that you never thought of harm. Is it not so?"

"Evil dwells in the heart—in all our hearts," said the little French matron seriously. "It cannot be kept out by convent *grilles*. It depends upon the grace of *le bon Dieu*, who gives or withholds."

"Perfectly right and orthodox besides, Madame Lecomte," said Allerton, "and now suppose we ascend to the roof of the mosque."

Superb, almost limitless, was the view which greeted their eyes as they looked forth over that grand and varied panorama in the cool morning hour. All lower Egypt lay spread out, map-like, below. Cairo, with its flat-roofed houses, into which Asmodeus could have peeped and seen the inmost life of the inhabitants. The broad valley of the Nile, stretched northward, with the life of Egypt, the mighty river winding through the green rice-fields, as in olden Pharaoh days. Westward rose the Pyramids, calm, vast, unchanged for ages. Camels were sailing in swaying lines over the desert ocean. As the sun lighted up the bare red sands, they could descry the brilliantly vivid verdure of the irrigated sections. Water-wheels were flashing in the sun-rays, as the tiny buckets poured the precious element over trench and garden plot. From deep wells asses were patiently drawing, as in the days of Isaac and Rebecca. A low hum of population greeted the ear. All told of the ancient days—the elder races of the earth. Among the earliest actors in the world's grandest tragedies were the people on whose descendants they now gazed.

"Most wonderful, grand, overpowering!" said Marguerite. "Stranger still to think that we English were living amid woods, in huts, when temples and shrines, palaces and aqueducts crowded the land of Egypt. And what are its people now? We were barbarians. They are slaves. Could we but see Pharaoh on his throne, the herds of Jewish slaves dragging the enormous idol images! Then the lawgiver, the deliverer; the Desert again; the weary march; the Promised Land. Then the Roman, the Greek, the Moslem—a succession of conquerors. It oppresses one's brain."

"Life is too short for the contemplation of great

subjects," said Allerton. "I should like to stay here for a year again. I did so once. But civilisation is so exacting, and one is always enticed away from the charmed solitude of Eastern life."

"May it not become enervating?" said Marguerite. "Is there not danger of subsiding into dream life, useless to the world, and hardly healthful for one's true self?"

"Yes, sure to turn one into a regular crawler," interposed Isabel, who, tiring of the view, was now anxious for adventure. "That's what it would do, Mr. Bruce, with you. Let me catch you stopping behind and mooning about like an old dervish. You want sharpening up on occasions as it is, I can tell you. Now, let us go into the courtyard. I want to see where they shut the gates when they'd yarded the poor Mamelukes, and where Emin Bey on his white horse 'broke' and jumped the wall. It's a great pity they didn't all do it before they were safe in the 'crush.'"

"You forget, Isabel," said Allerton, smiling at the young Australian's vehemence, "that Mrs. Mortimer doesn't understand bush idioms. I daresay she never saw a cattle muster, or, indeed, heard of one."

"Wait till she gets to Merradoolah, then we'll teach her all about it. She *would* stare to see me with a stockwhip, wouldn't she? Or riding my old pony bare-backed? I could do that once." Here Mr. Allerton held up his finger in a warning manner. "Oh, dear! I suppose I shall have to be good and proper, and behave so prettily when I go back, that I sha'n't know myself. And now let us have a good look at the citadel. So that was the gateway where they all rode in on the 1st of March, 1811. I can see them jostling one another," she continued, looking fixedly before her; "the sun shining on their arms and chain mail corselets; their beautiful horses arching their necks, laying back their ears, plunging a little sometimes for play and frolic; then they all draw up in line,—in rank three and four deep, just about there, with their faces towards Cairo; suddenly a volley of firearms, after that cannon; the dear horses wounded and killed; saddles emptied;

men in the death agony; it is too horrible! And there is the place where Emin Bey jumped his horse over. He was a young man then and the finest swordsman in his troop, the book says. It isn't a high jump from this side," said the girl, breasting the wall. "Old Wallaby, my roan pony, could do it easily enough; but what a fearful drop on the stones below! No wonder the poor white horse was killed; it was a miracle that his rider escaped; lived to be an old man—fancy that! I feel as if I could cry about it all now."

"You must write a long account of it in your journal," said Marguerite; "it will calm your excited feelings, and we can refer to it in the quiet Australian days afterwards. Now I think your mother has gone into the Pasha's palace. Suppose we follow. Fancy a palace built of pale yellow marble as this is."

Isabel was almost dragged away from the battlements still uttering lamentations for the Mamelukes, which did not cease until she was called to admire a marble bathroom. This came quite up to her idea of a perfect affair of the kind, being composed of the same beautiful material—walls and floors—with a spacious sunken bath large enough for any amount of luxurious splashing. The furniture of the principal apartments was European, not of a high order of merit, being tawdry and huddled together without taste or arrangement. The carpets were, of course, rich and expensive; ottomans were numerous. Chairs and tables are not necessary in Eastern households; these were few in number and wore a neglected appearance.

"We've about seen everything that is to be seen," said Mr. Baldhill; "is there any other place we could ride to, Allerton, now we've got the donkeys steadied and used to Christian ways? My fellow begins to understand a hunting-crop already."

"Everything Egyptian understands the whip," said Allerton, "beginning with men and women. It is an ancient argument that will not be disused as long as the Moslems rule them. If nobody is tired we could ride to Heliopolis,—only five miles."

"The very thing," said Isabel. "Isn't that where the great Temple of the Sun stood?"

"Yes, it was called 'On,' four thousand years ago. Joseph was married there to Asenath," replied Marguerite.

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Baldhill, "I'd like to see that place above all things."

"Unfortunately there is nothing left but an obelisk or two," said Allerton, "which probably terminated avenues of statues. But the road is a pretty one, shaded by plane trees and running between meadows and cornfields."

"I should like a quiet bush ride now," mused Isabel; "after all these wonders, we shall suffer from indigestion if we don't have a little peace and quietness. It is not particularly hot. It would be the very thing."

They rode gaily back down the winding path by which they had ascended, Mr. Baldhill's donkey, instead of the proverbial surefootedness of the race, making more than one perilous stumble.

"But they are ugly, these men of Egypt! And the women," said Marie; "could one but see their faces, they are perhaps worse!"

"They certainly are a rum lot," said Mr. Baldhill, whose habitual good humour had been rather interfered with by his donkey's behaviour. "Dirty, lemon-coloured mongrel thieves and rascals they all look. Half of 'em with one eye, and like enough to lose both with dirt. I believe they used to put them out themselves, so as not to be took for soldiers."

"Mehemet Ali was in the habit of ordering one hand to be chopped off if he caught them at it," said Allerton. "He was terribly cruel when anything roused his tiger nature. Slaves of slaves have they been for centuries."

As they threaded the close alleys of the city before arriving at the road to Heliopolis they came to the gold and silver bazaar. Of course, Isabel decided to go in, so a halt was called, and some strangely fashioned silver jewellery, fabricated in the Soudan and Abyssinia, was added to her store. Mr. Baldhill treated himself to a Turkish bridle and saddle-cloth at

the saddlery bazaar opposite, while Mrs. Baldhill presented Marie and Marguerite with a quaint silver bracelet and a necklace each.

As they were coming out of the saddlery bazaar a swarthy native, meanly dressed, walking rather close to them, looked for a moment fixedly at Isabel as if about to speak. Allerton gave him a push which caused him to reel, and said something the reverse of complimentary in Arabic. The Bedouin turned half round and stared resentfully at Allerton, but, apparently changing his mind, placed the palms of his hands together and humbly salaamed, repeating a verse of the Koran which enjoins the followers of the Prophet to behave lowly and reverently to all their betters, or words to that effect.

"Poor fellow," said Isabel. "You are a little hard upon him, Mr. Bruce. See, there he stands still, looking after us, and those naughty donkey-boys are laughing at him!"

"It is the only way to treat natives," said Allerton. "If you had seen as much of them as I have, you would think so too."

"When you go back to Sydney you will have to behave differently," said Isabel, archly. "Our countrymen won't stand that sort of thing; will they, papa?"

"It's another thing abroad," said Mr. Baldhill; "if we didn't knock 'em about a bit they'd walk over you. But I noticed something different about that Arab. Here we come to the road! I wish we could get the trees to grow along ours like these. What a famous canter we could have here, on a fast horse! Hang this donkey! he falls on his head like Teddy Rowe's pony."

"What story was that, daddy?" said Isabel, sidling up to him. "Tell it to us, as we can't go very fast."

"Well," said Mr. Baldhill, somewhat placated, "Teddy Rowe the butcher, in old times, had a stout pony, mostly known as 'Stumbling Bobby.' Well, one day he sells this wretch to a young Englishman as had just come out, full of money, and thought he was a judge of a horse. A nice price he got too. It wasn't the thing, but there's no love in horse dealin'. Well, a

day or two afterwards back comes the new chum, leadin' Bobby with two broken knees.

"'I wish you to take this horse back,' says the young man very serious; 'he's been and endangered my life. I believed him to be sound and safe.'

"'Well, this here's the most extraordinary thing,' said Teddy, feeling the old horse's knees, and shaking his head quite solemn. 'If you'll believe me, sir,' he says, 'I never knew him do such a thing before.'

"'What?' shouted the young fellow, 'never knew him come down?'

"'Never knew him come down on his knees before, I'll take my oath,' says Teddy; 'always fell on his 'ed.'"

When they had finished laughing at the jest, which no doubt the lately-arrived Briton ruefully acknowledged, they commenced to realise the wondrous beauty of the scenery around them—the swaying trees, the wide fields and meadows so refreshingly green, the bare and burning desert, the flocks of white ibis which fed tamely amid the corn, the Pyramids—vast, solitary, changeless, mutely eloquent of the past.

"Wonderful does it not seem that we moderns should dare to lounge and ponder over these awful memorials?" said Allerton. "Fancy one of those old mummies of Royalty, which doubtless are to be found somewhere underneath this Temple of On, coming to life! How he would scorch us with his glance!"

"The mind refuses to realise the scenes of daily life which must have been here enacted," answered Marguerite, to whom he had addressed himself. "The vast pillared halls, the priestly throng, the swarming worshippers, the dread presence of the monarch. And now, to wander here when all are gone, and but one sculptured stone to tell of the dread past!"

"Egypt is one vast ruin," said Allerton, "one mighty sepulchre, wherein lie buried the arts, the sciences, the wisdom and the power of a dead world. Their memorial is perished with them; the present inhabitants are but as birds or insects which perch or crawl amid these august fragments."

"May not the same be said of other empires?" said

Marguerite, pursuing the subject. "See the contrast between modern and ancient Rome or Greece. In their cities the same thought strikes one—the decadence of empires, the degradation of races, which, once fallen, never recover their position."

"To the Teuton and Slav, with their allied races, the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celt, will be delivered over the dominion of the world in ages to come," said Allerton. "Stubborn resistance will be made by other nationalities, doubtless, but their hour of retrogression has struck; their decadence is inevitable. There is no appeal from the Nemesis of nations."

"And will the same terrible doom overtake proud England and her sons?" asked Marguerite. "Are we all but the ephemeral creatures of remorseless destiny, following our appointed course of growth, maturity, decay, and death—even as these flower-stems on which we tread? It is an unutterably saddening theory."

"Our Faith bids us hope," said Allerton gently. "The Christian religion is the only one which concerns itself with the eternal future of all mankind. Our Government protects the helpless, encourages the bold, yet metes out even-handed justice to all. Amid these slaves even a whisper arises that 'England is coming.' If there be hope for humanity in the future, Britain and the empires yet to spring from her should possess it."

"May Heaven grant it!" said Marguerite. "This mortal life deprived of hope would be dreary beyond expression; but for the doom of a nation distrusting the present and despairing of the future, what words can be found sufficiently melancholy?"

"There must be hope in life," said Allerton more cheerfully, as by an effort he threw off the gloom which had invaded their mood, "while the sun burns brightly in yon unclouded sky, while the shadowy trees still wave and the fountain murmurs, while all nature expresses life—vivid, sentient, onward-pressing—and while that life in every land, in every clime, has yet another aspect, another name."

"And that one?" said Marguerite softly.

"Have you never heard that it is known as Love?" he answered, fixing his gaze upon her.

"Here come our young companions," said she, with a change of manner, as Isabel came scampering up followed by Marie, whose donkey, fired with noble emulation, pressed forward with unwonted speed. Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill followed at some distance.

"And so this is really supposed to be where the great Temple of the Sun was built?" said Isabel. "I don't deny it; but do you think, Mr. Allerton, that they could have carried away every stone of it and left only that old obelisk?"

"It is difficult to believe," he answered; "but we know that all the useful building materials were taken by the order of Mehemet Ali for a palace. These stones, being dressed with wonderful accuracy, would be valuable for ordinary buildings, and being so near to Cairo have doubtless been extensively used. What do you say, Mr. Baldhill?"

"I don't know that I can account for it," said that gentleman. "In some ruins every stone looks as if it had been dressed yesterday. And here there isn't one stone to lay upon another."

"Well, I'm disappointed," said Mrs. Baldhill. "If this is where Joseph was married, he might as well have stayed behind in the bush with his brothers. But perhaps there's some mistake."

"That is not impossible," said Allerton; "but it is here that learned men fix the site of Heliopolis. What shall we do now? By the time we reach Cairo we shall have done a good day's work."

"Can't we go and see the Pyramids by moonlight?" said Isabel. "No doubt it would be lovely—and what a thing to remember!"

"We should remember it a good while," said Mrs. Baldhill, "because we should be next door to dead. As for Marie, we should leave her behind altogether. She'd have to be buried in one of the King's chambers. No, we'll go home quietly; and if we must see the Pyramids, we can make an early start to-morrow and see them comfortably."

"With every consideration for Miss Isabel's enthusiasm," said Allerton, "I second Mrs. Baldhill's proposition. I foresee that I shall be exhausted when we reach

Shepheard's. Remember the grave question of dinner has been wholly neglected to-day."

"Dinner, indeed!" said Isabel, contemptuously. "How can any one think of eating and drinking amid such wonderful objects?"

"I've been thinking a deal more of dinner than the Temple of the Sun this last half-hour," said Mr. Baldhill; "but if this donkey of mine reaches Cairo without a brace of tumbles, I'll turn Turk, and offer up a thanksgiving of some sort."

"We ought to make up our minds," said Allerton, "as to what we are to do to-morrow, or to leave undone. There is the Museum at Boulak; there are the Pyramids; or, as Miss Isabel is so interested in the whole affair, there are the tombs of the Mamelukes, also the petrified forest."

"I couldn't go away from Cairo without seeing the Pyramids," asserted Isabel decisively. "I should never dare to show my face in Sydney if I were obliged to confess I hadn't seen them and been to the top. I should feel as if we ought to go back for the satisfaction of one's friends."

"Won't it be too fatiguing?" said her mother. "You know you mustn't knock yourself up, darling. The Arabs are rather a bother, they told us at the hotel."

"I think I can manage that part of the business," said Allerton. "It appears to me the best choice. I will hire a couple of carriages, which will be less fatiguing for the ladies than our present arrangement."

"I'm full up of donkey-riding," said Mr. Baldhill. "I've never been accustomed to them, and if I can't get a hack of some sort, I must try a camel."

"Fancy dear old dad on a camel!" said Isabel. "I think I should prefer an elephant. We saw two yesterday; didn't we, Marie? One knelt down so nicely for the man to get up. I'm afraid they're a little slow."

It might have been the long day, or the fate of the Mamelukes, but the travellers wore a calmly contemplative air as they approached Cairo. When the city came into view, between the plain and the Mokattam mountain-range, gold-shadowed with the setting sun,

the wide and brilliantly-coloured prospect showed strangely splendid, beyond description. The mountain crags, all sharply defined against the deep-hued sky; the dusky, radiant tones of the mountains against the sea of verdure beneath, made the contrast grandly effective.

Plantations of olives, groves of acacias, the minarets of the city, mingled with waving palms, the domes of countless mosques above the massed level of the houses, towers and ramparts half-hidden by aged sycamores, century-old gardens in which Zobeide or Fatima might have wandered and sighed, near the white marble lip of her favourite fountain; all these and a hundred other adjuncts of the wondrous landscape made up a scene of Eastern magnificence which hushed the gazers into wondering silence.

Isabel, seldom contented to remain quiescent for any protracted period, however, broke the spell.

"What a glimpse of the *Arabian Nights!*" she cried. "It seems as if Haroun Alraschid might come back at any time and send a Barmecide to ask us to a banquet. The Barmecide's feast wouldn't exactly suit any of us at the present moment, particularly papa. Oh, dear! what a funny crowd we are getting into now! Look at that black slave on the camel; his white turban makes him look like an old magpie. That's a lady, with her long veil, I suppose; and those women carrying water on their heads—what funny blue bathing-dresses they wear! There's an Armenian, with his tall cap. That old Turk smoking his long pipe on the white donkey, with a red saddle like a small sofa, looks more comfortable than you, papa. I declare it's like a fancy ball. I'd give the world to dress up and go about amongst them. I wonder if I could ever learn Arabic?"

"You're better off as you are, my dear," said Marguerite. "With youth on your side, and everything to make you happy, you may well be contented with your lot."

"Oh, I'm contented enough," said Isabel, "only I should like to *do* things. I don't feel as if I had enough scope for my spirit of adventure. I should like to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca."

"My friend Richard Francis Burton performed that feat," said Allerton. "I suppose no other European ever did so. It was sufficiently dangerous; he would have been killed without mercy if the fanatical Mahommedans had discovered him."

"Oh, how nice, how delightful!" said Isabel, clapping her hands. "And how did he manage?"

"He was disguised, of course. He had been burnt as dark as any Arab in his many wanderings and desert journeys. He speaks Arabic perfectly, and is, moreover, acquainted with all the religious ceremonies enjoined in the Koran to an extent which makes him equal to most mollahs."

"And did they never find him out? How exciting it must have been!"

"There *is* a story," said Allerton; "but I will not vouch for the truth of it. It was told me by an Indian officer. His nationality was accidentally discovered by two of his Moslem companions one day. He was incautious."

"And what did he do?"

"Killed both of them on the spot, knowing, of course, that it was his only chance of saving his own life."

"Oh! how dreadful! I don't like him for that," said the girl, shudderingly. "But there is a terrible sort of fascination about such a character. I can fancy him like the Templar in *Ivanhoe*. I would give all the world to see him; would not you, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"I have no doubt that he would prove a most interesting acquaintance," said Marguerite; "but I cannot get over the two poor Turks. We must hope that it is untrue. However, there is not much chance of meeting him here."

"I'm not so sure," said Allerton. "He has been out on some expedition lately through the ancient territory of Midian, which he has had a sort of order from our Government to explore. I heard a man from the hotel say that he was expected back."

"Is he married?" asked Isabel, with great interest.

"Oh, yes; for some years past. I believe his wife occasionally travels with him, when the journey is not too dangerous."

"She must be the happiest woman in the world. I can't imagine anything more delightful," said Isabel.

"*I've* been travelling enough for the present, pussy, and so have you, I think," said Mr. Baldhill. "We're close up to the hotel, thank goodness! A bath and a lie down will do us all more good than anything else. You can rest your tongue a bit, too, and be all the fresher for it after dinner. I feel as if I'd ridden a hundred miles."

None of the party felt particularly sorry when they dismounted at the hotel steps. There seemed, however, an unusual stir and bustle, even for that unquiet locality. Most of the *habitués* of the hotel, with a military general and several military officers whom they knew by sight, were gathered around a bronzed Englishman of striking appearance, in uniform, who seemed to be the centre of all interest. Isabel turned her eyes upon him, attracted by his bold bearing and handsome features.

"Good heavens!" said Allerton suddenly; "why it's the very man himself! Burton, my dear fellow! so you're safe back? Delighted to see you. Allow me to present you to Mrs. Baldhill and these ladies, who are dying to know you; also to my good friend and neighbour, Mr. Baldhill."

The chivalrous-looking officer took off his cap and bowed low. Then the expression of his countenance altered strangely. He placed his hands before him with Eastern humility, and murmured the Arab salutation for an inferior.

Isabel gazed in astonishment, then smiled archly. "I do believe you were the Arab that Mr. Allerton pushed so rudely near the bazaar this morning. What a delicious joke!"

Allerton looked disconcerted for a moment as the truth burst upon him. Then the whole party, divining the jest, and guessing that it was owing to one of their comrade's marvellous disguises, burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"I have reason to be proud of the completeness of my disguise if it imposed upon you, Allerton. You remember our jolly voyage from Aden, don't you, when John Lang, of *The Englishman*, was on board? It's

quite a feather in my cap. I must send you a photo of myself, inscribed, 'Lo! the poor Indian.'"

"Will you dine with us to-morrow, Captain Burton?" interposed Mr. Baldhill, with commendable promptness. "I won't ask you to join our party to the Pyramids, as you've seen enough of that kind of thing; but seven o'clock will find us at our rooms. I hope you'll come."

The great traveller excused himself from the Pyramid excursion on the ground of official duty; but to Isabel's unconcealed delight, assented to the dinner proposition.

CHAPTER XXII

"THIS is indeed the land of wonders and enchantments," said Isabel, as they were all seated at dinner, concerning the arrival of which Mr. Baldhill had been a trifle impatient. "Fancy our meeting Captain Burton, of all people! And oh! Mr. Allerton, what a splendid story it will be against you in Australia. Fancy your mistaking him for an Arab, and pushing him nearly over."

"The highest compliment that could be paid to him, I assure you," said Allerton coolly. "Showed the perfection of his disguise. I might have to do more than push some of the Arabs at the Pyramids to-morrow if they are as noisy and troublesome as they are generally."

"There's no chance of our being robbed or thrown down into a dark chamber, is there?" asked Mrs. Baldhill, doubtfully. "When they get you all by yourselves these people turn so fierce and troublesome."

"You need not alarm yourself, my dear Mrs. Baldhill," said Allerton, "I have done the Pyramids before, and know a sovereign remedy for managing the Arabs without force. I had it from my last dragoman, Mahmoud, who was skilled in all the learning of the Egyptians."

After breakfast Mr. Allerton, agreeably to his pro-

mise, provided two carriages with spirited little horses, which spun away merrily with the party in two sections. Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill, with Marie, composed one division, while Marguerite and Isabel had the privilege of being "personally conducted" by Mr. Allerton. A basket of ominous size was also placed in this vehicle, which somewhat inconvenienced the legs of the driver, but was not otherwise objectionable.

The day was fair, the eastern sky, so rarely discoloured with clouds, was glowing azure as the little party drove merrily over the iron bridge which spans the Nile.

The wide levels on either side of the great river looked emerald bright in the sunlight which embathed them. In the distance camels were traversing the sea-like plain; and Allerton pointed out a troop of Bedouin, with their long lances and haughty steeds, who would not, but for pressing need, come so near to the city of the Osmanli.

The fellaheen were busily attending to various duties by the river side, where probably their forefathers had been born, clearing water channels, closing others with the foot, as in biblical history, or raising fresh supplies by means of water-wheels. In the foreground of the vast nature-picture upon which their eyes now gazed all was busy, struggling, crowded life. In the middle-distance were the wondrous edifices they had come to behold. Enduring embolic forms, astronomical observatories, masonic surveying apparatus, or royal tombs, who can say for what purpose they were designed? Their makers are with the dust of countless generations. In the distance the limitless desert ocean, upon the surface of which how many a wild array—warriors and hunters—aye, hunters of men—had joyed and fought, fled and triumphed, for a period coeval with the very dawn of history!

"I never can quite get into my head that this is the very same Egypt—the regular identical place," said Mrs. Baldhill to her husband, "that mother used to read to us all about when I was little. Poor mother! She did her best with all us boys and girls, and dull enough we used to think Sunday with church twice a-day and Scripture lessons at night. Never a book or newspaper

in the house that wasn't put away as if they was poison. And the long summer afternoons! The Hawkesbury farmhouse, where we lived, looked that neat and clean and done up tidy as if there never was life coming to pass till judgment day. Well, young people now have a deal more liberty than we had. I don't know that the strict ways ever did us any harm. It was many a year after mother died that I dared so much as think of doing anything she used to tell us was wrong. I seemed to hear her voice speaking a bit sharp, as she used to do, and it drove all the nonsense clean out of my head."

"I don't hold altogether to reining young people up too tight," said Mr. Baldhill contemplatively; "it's sure to make 'em rear or turn sulky. All the same, the old-fashioned families turned out plenty of hard-working young fellows and regular good girls, as anybody could see with half an eye would never bolt off the course. That was why I picked you, old woman, didn't I? If you'd never learned about Egypt and all that, you might have growed up different, mightn't you?"

"Like as not," said Mrs. Baldhill, in a softened voice; "there was plenty as did so—poor old mother! She was a good woman if ever there was one. Working and praying and reading the Bible, and worriting herself about us boys and girls and father, her life never seemed to have time in it to sit down. Father used to say she went too far sometimes, but he soon came to again. When mother died he never seemed to care about anything like he used to do, and he didn't stop long after her."

"Well, we must all die some day, old woman, mustn't we?" said her husband. "I hope we'll go together when the time comes. What were you agoing to read out of the Book?"

Mrs. Baldhill had taken out her pocket Bible and was looking through Genesis with a doubtful air until she came to the following passage:—"And Abram journeyed, going on still towards the south. And there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land."

"So, you see, Abram came down here, because it was a regular dry season, and there was not much chance of grass or corn except upon the frontage," said Mr. Baldhill, looking back upon the broad riband of verdure which followed the river borders. "That's it; and how things happened thousands of years ago, just as they do in Australia at this present day. I should say, now, that's about the first drought of any consequence that is mentioned anywhere in the world."

"I couldn't say but it is," answered Mrs. Baldhill, looking up and down the course of the river. "I wonder which way we'll have to go to cut this Ur of the Chaldees, as it's called? I must ask Mr. Allerton. He knows everything, and very likely he has been there. Well, Hagar was an Egyptian," continued the good matron, "and when she and Ishmael were turned out of the house—and quite right too—it says,'. . . and became an archer and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.' So if the Arabs all come from him, they had a mother and grandmother, born Egyptians, so they're not far off being the same sort of people."

"And a bad sort too," said Mr. Baldhill.

"How dread and awful is this place" said Marguerite, as they drew up on to the plateau, slightly elevated above the ordinary desert, upon which the great Pyramid rests its eternal base. "Could one fancy armies of workmen labouring like ants to raise these mighty structures? If only one could recall the past, I sometimes fancy that will be among the joys of heaven."

"I should hardly like to say," said Allerton, "under the circumstances; a hundred thousand people were employed here, Herodotus says. We shall find thirty Arabs quite as much as we can manage. If Pharaoh's hosts were *en évidence*, we should be set to making bricks without straw, or some even less agreeable task wholly opposed to modern ideas of comfort."

"Things are best as they are, you think, Mr. Allerton," said Isabel. "I'm of that opinion too, especially as far as you and I are concerned, for we must confess to having a pretty good time of it, all things considered. We have the Jews on our side too."

"And they are not to be despised in these days," said Allerton. "Pharaoh and his hosts—where are they? Now the descendants of Joseph and his brethren are great men at every Court in Europe."

"Oh, here come mother and dad!" said Isabel. "What a time they've been! They've stopped to have a talk. How these Arabs are crowding up! They will frighten poor old Mum, if you don't mind."

"Don't trouble yourself," said Allerton. "I think I promised to arrange matters." He spoke a few words of Arabic to the driver, who instantly pointed out a white-bearded Arab with a huge turban. To him Allerton made his way, parting the crowd of gesticulating savages with his usual haughty indifference.

A short colloquy ensued, terminated by the transfer of certain coins into the Arab's hand. A decisive gesture followed. The sheik, for such he was, of the village of Ghizeh, immediately opposite the Pyramids, addressed his adherents—using much stern and authoritative gesture. The swart dwellers under the shadow of the Pyramids appeared to have received an effectual quietus. They salaamed humbly, turning towards the carriages, then withdrew, leaving behind but a small body-guard, who, at the signal of their leader, prepared to attend the party and to render such assistance as might be necessary.

"Whatever kept you so long, mother?" said Isabel. "We thought the Arabs had run away with you."

"Your father and I were having a talk about Egypt," said the old lady gravely.

Marguerite elected to remain with Mrs. Baldhill, while Allerton, with Mr. Baldhill, Isabel, and Marie, dared the fatigues and perils of the ascent. There was no great difficulty experienced; Allerton and Isabel, eager and active, sprang up the great Pyramid with ease and rapidity. Marie and Mr. Baldhill came steadily behind, both occasionally indebted to the respectful assistance of the Arabs who had become most obsequious.

At length the top was reached, and Isabel proudly surveyed the almost limitless landscape, standing upon the summit of one of this changing world's unchanging wonders.

"This is a moment worth doing and daring for," said the excited girl. "How little I ever dreamed that I should be here! I wonder if Pharaoh stood on this very stone, surrounded by his courtiers, one holding a great painted umbrella to keep the sun from his royal head?" Perhaps he had a slave thrown down for a little sport sometimes, and to see how he banged against the sides."

"The nearest we can go to that pastime," said Allerton, "is to get one of those fellows to run down the Pyramid in eight minutes. He will be happy to do it for a franc."

"But suppose he should fall?"

"I will ask him. See how proud and injured he looks! We must let him go now or his feelings will be hurt."

Permission was reluctantly given, and away started the eager son of the desert down the tremendous incline, leaping from stone to stone with wondrous agility, and in about the number of minutes specified made his final spring on to the plateau at the base."

"*Ah, ciel,*" exclaimed Marie, "he is a bird, not a man. How he goes to fall and recovers himself. He thinks no more of this most noble structure than of a mason's ladder. Was it here where the battle of the Pyramids was fought by the conqueror of conquerors, Napoleon? 'Forty ages look down upon you,' as he told those soldiers. Those gallant men! To think we should be here, while they are dust."

"Didn't some one conquer *him*, by the way, Marry?" asked Mr. Baldhill. "He was a great man and a fine soldier; but there was one, Arthur Duke of Wellington, unless I forget my history book. And a battle called Waterloo, wasn't there?"

"He was beaten, not by the English, but by treachery," said the patriotically indignant Marie. "Then he was betrayed into going on board your war vessel. Oh, it was cruel, it was base of you English! I wonder you can talk of it, Monsieur!"

"Never mind, Marry," said Mr. Baldhill sagely; "he was locked up to keep the peace of the world, or you and I might not be able to travel so comfortably now. 'All's well that ends well.'"

"The end is not yet," said Marie darkly. "France will never forget that wrong—that insult—while she is a nation."

"Perhaps—who knows, little woman," replied Mr. Baldhill, peacefully, "there will be no wars by-and-bye, only arbitration and actions for damages. It's the best paying way, and then innocent women and children don't have to stand the racket. Come, Isabel, I think it's time to get down. Mother and Mrs. Mortimer will feel lonely."

"So they will. Mr. Allerton, you go first and I'll follow. If I slip I'll catch hold of you. I suppose it wouldn't do for me to see if I could run down in eight minutes like that Arab. I have a good mind to try."

"No, you won't frighten your old daddy, will you, pussy? I don't say you couldn't do it. But suppose you slipped?"

"I was only joking," replied the girl; "but I've got a great fancy for doing what other people do, particularly if there's a spice of danger in it. Were you like that when you were young, daddy?"

"Well, in some ways," said Mr. Baldhill, contemplatively, as if recalling with difficulty the days of his youth. "I never saw the colt I couldn't back. I was reckoned middling good with the gloves, or in a stock-yard, and there wasn't a man on any station within fifty miles that could run me a hundred yards. But that's many a day ago."

"That accounts for it," said Isabel. "I don't want to do anything wrong that I know of, but I like to try whether other people are cleverer or more active or better plucked than I am. I can ride a little, but that and tennis are the only things that I see a chance of distinguishing myself in."

"Wait till we get to Ceylon," said Allerton. "I know the Government House people there, and we'll get up a tournament, Australia against all India. You and I will challenge them. There are very likely to be some people from the Bombay Presidency there."

"Oh, how charming!" said Isabel. "I should like another real good exciting game, and as luck would have it, I've brought all my traps with me. Here we

are at the bottom, and there's mother and Mrs. Mortimer quite safe, with the old sheik keeping guard over them."

It was even so. Mrs. Baldhill had secured wraps and cushions from the carriages, and had arranged comfortable lounges for herself and Marguerite. The sheik had intimated that they were specially under his protection, and upon interrogation it was discovered that he spoke French reasonably well, Italian fairly, though with English his acquaintance was moderate. Marguerite was therefore enabled to extract some information from him about Ghizeh and adjoining localities. He also informed her of the general Arab belief that the Pyramids had an astronomical significance and measurement, and were also the tombs of the early Egyptian kings.

"Oh, mother, mother, we've had such a delightful climb!" said Isabel; "I feel as if I could do a Pyramid or two before breakfast. Are there not more in Upper Egypt? I am sure I saw so in some book. I must do one or two more, particularly as very few people know more except these. We must see the King's Chamber too. But first and foremost, we must have lunch. I don't know about the rest of the party, but I'm ravenous."

The basket being brought out and unladen, a tempting meal was displayed, to which every one did fair justice, Isabel laughing and talking, eating and drinking with but little cessation. The day was not very hot, fortunately. All the party were in good spirits. Mrs. Baldhill, having nearly identified the probable track of Joseph's brethren during their migration to Egypt in another dry season, was satisfied and happy. As for Marguerite she abandoned herself, as had been her wont of late, to the influence of the hour, and was by the contagion of cheerfulness raised nearly to the pitch of absolute pleasure.

"The world is strange," thought she in one of the intervals when a transient fit of introspection possessed her, "and we who have been sent to inhabit it are stranger still. Who could have foreseen for me this voyage, this journey, this companionship? More

astonishing still that I could have borne, not only with complacency, but almost with gratification, this magically altered life. But I must not think—I must only endure, lest I go mad or die."

"Take a glass of champagne, Mrs. Mortimer," said the kind voice of Mr. Baldhill. "You're looking a little off colour. Most likely it's the heat—nothing like a glass of champagne for freshening one up a bit. I'm going to give the old sheik a tumbler and tell him it's ginger beer, or English rose-water."

Marguerite, with an effort, returned to the world of fact, forcing herself to eat her share of lunch and sip her champagne like the others; while Marie and Isabel watched with girlish delight the old sheik, forbidden by his creed to touch wine, gravely accept Mr. Baldhill's explanation, and solemnly drink off the tumbler of Mousseux, smacking his lips with an air of gentle satisfaction.

"It's my belief that old chap's tried champagne before," said the shrewd colonist; "he didn't make any kind of a face. Never mind, it will do him good, and he's behaved first rate. I see the best way with these fellows is to square the head man. We must do that as we go along, eh, Bruce?"

"I have always found it efficacious," said the Australian. "A gold key will open most locks; but you want to show those people and our friends at the First Cataract that we carry arms and can use them. We shall have capital shooting once we're away from Cairo. You can get anything on the river, from a crow to a crocodile."

"I sha'n't be sorry to have a little shooting again. I had some pretty fair partridge and pheasant shooting in England; but I like the wild game best. It seems to come more natural to us Australians than the barnyard-looking preserved game in the old country."

Lunch being over and the packing completed, an adjournment to the King's Chamber was voted. The party with difficulty traversed the narrow entrance passage into the dark, awe-stricken vault wherein the dread and sacred corpse of the god-monarch of his day was laid. They were shown where the true entrance was,

and how it was supposed to have been stopped up, permitting the women to descend by a shaft.

"However, these roof-beams—stones that must weigh forty or fifty tons each—were got up beats me," said Mr. Baldhill. "No king could get such work done now—alive or dead. They've sawed lots of these stones, you can see the marks, and precious hard metal they must have used. Then the cement, it's so thin—and as hard as the rock itself between the joints. If Pharaoh's old master-mason was to come alive again all our architects would have to go to school to him."

"Many explanations have been given," said the younger man, "but I hardly find any of them conclusive. It appears certain that the ancients had secrets which we have not sounded. But wait till you get to Esneh and Syene; you have seen no ruins to speak of yet. Pyramids, obelisks, statues, and temples are as the sands of the sea where we are going."

"Time we made a start of it," said Mr. Baldhill. "It's rather musty in here for my fancy; and as we've a lot of work before us, we had better get back to the hotel. Is there anything else to see?"

"Only the Sphinx."

"Whatever's that?" said Mr. Baldhill. "Alive or dead? I don't know that I've ever heard of it. It's a riddle, though, ain't it?"

"Oh, you must have heard of it," said Allerton, reassuringly. "You're a great reader, you know. Didn't I hear Miss Isabel reading a description of it out of *Eöthen* to Mrs. Mortimer just before dinner at the hotel one day? It's a colossal figure, half-buried in the sand, a woman's face and bust, with a lion's body and claws."

"A lion's or a tiger's?" inquired Mr. Baldhill with interest.

"A lion's," replied Allerton.

"Well, I don't see anything in it, then," replied Mr. Baldhill, doubtfully. "I've known a woman or two that had a good deal of the tigress about 'em. However, I suppose they had something in their minds and lots of idle time, one would think, these Egyptians, to see the things they turned out. They didn't pay their men a pound a-week and find them, I expect."

"Most probably not. They controlled the labour market of the period, even later than the days of Pharaoh. Mehemet Ali, when he made the Mahmoudieh Canal, took a hundred thousand men by force, and made them dig out the mud with their hands. Nearly a third died. We English, I believe, are the only nation, after all, that is strictly just and fair with these kind of people. I am not sure whether we get any gratitude for it either."

"It's the right thing, and doing as we'd be done by, anyhow," said Mr. Baldhill sturdily. "That's a line that'll pull a man or a nation through in the long run. We've held on to it too long to give it up now. It wouldn't seem English, to my thinking, to do anything else."

"And it isn't English to come all the way and not see things," said Isabel, who thought a political dissertation was imminent; "so if we can manage it before dark, we must see the Sphinx, particularly as she's a lady, and a lioness to boot. Do you think we can manage it, Mr. Allerton?"

"After a short colloquy with the sheik, I am reluctantly compelled to say that we do not think we can do so, having reference to our dinner engagement. You're to have the Hadji Abdullah, you know."

"Who is that?" asked Isabel.

"It is Captain Burton's well-known Arab name."

. . . . . .

The return journey had been pleasant; the day was over; every one was enjoying their *dolce far niente* freely in the balcony, watching the star-strewn sky, the gradually deepening shadows, and listening to the curiously mingled sounds of an Eastern city, when the guest was announced.

Arrayed in faultless evening costume, with his beard trimmed, his hair cropped *à la militaire*, and his heavy moustache alone worn Arab fashion, how aristocratic and dignified was his appearance—how different from the servile Oriental, whose manner he could so easily assume!

"Most happy to see you, Captain Burton," said Mr. Baldhill. "We have had a longish day, but we shall

freshen up directly. You're just returned from your travels as we are setting out."

"In which direction are you going?"

"Up the Nile—as far as Philæ," said Allerton. "I have chartered a good roomy dahabieh. I picked up the same reis as Thornton and I had two years ago, and the same dragoman. I think we shall have a pleasant time of it."

"I wish with all my heart I was going with you," said Captain Burton.

"And why not?" said Mr. Baldhill, while Isabel and Marie, and even Mrs. Baldhill and Marguerite, looked deeply interested in the traveller's reply. "What's to hinder you coming with us? There's room enough, and a hearty welcome."

"I am deeply grieved, perfectly desolated, indeed," said the captain, bending lowly and reverently; "but the fact is, I am due at Trieste, where I have been appointed consul. Otherwise I would have been only too glad to renew my old dreams around Esneh and the Upper Cataract."

"If it can't be, there's no help for it. Why don't you take a run out to Australia some day, Captain? We'd be all proud to see you; and there's a trifle of sun and sand, and bush travelling, and natives there that would suit you all to pieces. Anyway, here comes the dinner! I don't suppose they iced the champagne in that last journey of yours, did they?"

"There is still plenty of water and fruit in the land of Midian, where my path lay," said the Hadji. "For a follower of the Prophet, as I always choose to be in the desert, they are amply sufficient. When I return to civilisation, I receive a special dispensation."

"And were you really in the land of Midian—the real place in the Bible?" said Mrs. Baldhill, after the soup had departed and a commencement had been made with well-cooled chablis. "It seems so wonderful to us that it can be the very same place."

"Nothing is more certain, my dear madam," said the traveller. "If you had been with me to see the ruined cities, you would have thought them unchanged since the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of

the East were gathered together, and went over and pitched in the valley of Jezreel."

"That's in Judges," said Mrs. Baldhill, quite delighted with the knowledge of Scripture displayed by a military man, whom she had supposed to be in a general way careless of biblical lore; "and then further on, in the next chapter, it speaks of the gold earrings which the Israelites took as a prey, 'beside ornaments and collars and . . . the chains that were about their camels' necks.'"

"They might well have gold. And by the way, Allerton, you Australians are great miners. You ought to go out there and float a company for half-a-million or so. In that hour remember me! When I was doing my pilgrimage to Mecca, twenty years ago, some of my fellow-pilgrims, in all good faith, pointed out workings and places where gold had been found in ancient times. I searched out the same spots carefully on the return journey, and found traces of gold plentiful enough in the river-beds; more than that, tools that had evidently been used centuries ago."

"It's worth thinking about," said Mr. Baldhill. "Were there any other minerals?"

"Tin ore in abundance, and iron. I should say a rich mineral country."

"Is the water permanent?"

"Beautiful little streams, running through rich valleys. A lovely winter climate. Maize, too, grows famously."

"Why, you're describing our beloved country," said Allerton, "about the Upper Murray—all but the ruined cities; we can't have them yet awhile. But my mind's made up. If we have another dry season, Baldhill, we'll come over and go prospecting in Midian for the winter. In fact we'll get up a diggings of our own, and float a company—the great United Midian Quartz-crushing Company, Limited. Legal manager, Bruce Allerton, Esbekeyah Gardens, Cairo. Don't you think it would take well, Miss Isabel? I pass you over, Mrs. Mortimer, not from any want of proper respect, but because you don't know much, I take it, about gold mining."

"I'll come, and so will Marie," said that volatile damsel. "Her husband must come too, and we'll set up a boarding-house, and do a little antiquarian research with mother. Between whiles papa will brush up his Turkish—I heard him talk to a native quite fluently this morning—and Mr. Allerton—oh! yes, Mr. Allerton shall defend us from all rude Arabs; don't you think so, Captain Burton?"

Everybody laughed, including the traveller, who salaamed humbly as before, with a delicately counterfeited expression of humility. "You mustn't wonder at Bruce being taken in, Miss Baldhill," he said. "Better judges of costume and caste than he have been deceived, and I trust will again. For all Egypt is so quiet now, there is evil simmering underneath; and Hadji Abdullah will have to traverse the desert in Moslem garb again before many years are over our heads."

CHAPTER XXIII

"BUT I want a real description of Midian," said Isabel. "I don't care about the gold mining. It spoils every country it comes into, I think. Fancy 'Miners' Rights' at Midian! Wasn't it delicious to wander through the ruined cities? Couldn't you picture to yourself the king's daughter sitting by the fountain, and the falling water in the moonlight, and——"

"And everything that was poetical," laughed Captain Burton. "I daresay I had my moments of romance and inspiration, but the ruined palaces are such remarkable handy hiding places for robbers, that I had to be too much on my guard against surprises to think about the king's daughters."

"What a pity all the country does not belong to England," said Isabel. "Don't you think so? We should keep everybody in good order, and put down these bushrangers of Arabs in quick time. Why

doesn't England take Egypt and put an end to all this robbing and murdering?"

"Egypt is something like Turkey, you must understand: one of those countries which each of the great Powers is afraid some other one may get. Every one is acting on the dog-in-the-manger principle. The country has always suffered from bad rulers or from no rulers at all."

"But does not the Khedive make them do what he tells them, or cut their heads off?" inquired Isabel. "I thought all Turks were very clever at that sort of thing."

"The Khedive's tax-gatherers are a great deal more active than his magistrates," replied the traveller. "The Arabs and the half-wild negro Mahommedans beyond the Cataract do pretty much what they like. When they become too bad an army is sent and whole villages are depopulated. But that only happens now and then. In a little while things go on in the old way."

"Will not the land of Midian become accessible to Europeans?" asked Marguerite. "I remember an Eastern traveller who, some years since, passed through it in the month of May; he described fertile valleys, with flowers and fruits beside the streams. The soil appeared to be rich and only needing culture."

"Oh! that was Hugh Gordon. I have his journal, which I got when it was published. It gave me several hints. It is highly valued by all real travellers. The Arabs still talk of him. He went on to Damascus. I wonder what became of him? He has not written anything since. He must have been a splendid fellow."

"He still resides in England, I believe," replied Marguerite hesitatingly. Then, drawing back, became silent.

"He is a man in whom I always felt a deep interest," continued the traveller, fixing his dark piercing eyes upon her. "Did you by any chance happen to know him?"

"I knew him well," she answered. "That is, I used to hear of him from a friend. Of late years he has passed from my observation."

"I would give much to meet him," said Captain

Burton, not observing the confusion which now appeared in Marguerite's countenance. "You could not by any chance give me his address?"

"No, I have no idea. I believe he has changed his abode lately."

"We heard generally that he had lost his wife in a railway accident. I wonder if he married again? You must pardon my persistence; but we Eastern travellers were all so much interested in Gordon's book that any details of his life have a deep interest."

"You're going to write a book yourself, are you not, Captain?" now interposed Isabel, "all about Midian. Mind you send me a copy and write your name in it, and I'll send you my book about Egypt. *The Battle of the Nile* it is to be called."

"You may rely upon getting my work when it comes out," said he. "If yours reaches me it shall be placed among my particular treasures, and now you must permit me to say adieu! I have to be up before dawn."

On the next morning preparations commenced in good earnest for the all-important, new and strange experience, the Nile voyage. Many things had been arranged by Mr. Allerton, but much remained to do. He had purchased the dahabieh, and a very fine boat of her kind she was. The *Fatima* was about eighty feet long by eighteen or twenty feet broad. Her sides were low; her draught of water light. Broad beamed with a high stern well out of the water, she had a peculiar appearance; but her lines were fine, and she was a handsome craft on the whole.

She boasted two enormous lateen sails, and had besides oars and tow-ropes. On occasion she could be pushed along with poles. Her deckhouse, which, built at the stern, filled more than a third of her space, had latticed windows, and was otherwise convenient for lady passengers. A flat upper deck afforded a delightful lounge. Forward was the kitchen, covered with canvas, which was so extensively used for many purposes that the dahabieh resembled a floating tent as much as a boat. It was calculated that the wooden house would serve as chief abode for the ladies of the party. The upper deck was garnished with chairs,

divans, a table, a davenport writing desk, in which Isabel could stow away her manuscript, and daily describe the face of nature in the unstudied page which would be so interesting in the years to come.

After the boat was purchased (it had belonged to a brace of travelling aristocrats, who had suddenly elected to return to Europe, and so caused the *Fatima* to be sold at a sacrifice) there were many other things necessary to be done. Ibrahim got together the crew, including a grey-bearded old reis named "Rustum," who had been with Allerton and his friend on their last Nile voyage.

The late owners had been fairly luxurious, and, desirous of enjoying themselves on their rather protracted voyage, they had caused all kinds of cunningly devised lockers and secret drawers to be constructed in the sides and corners of the after house. These Mrs. Baldhill declared would be most useful to hold the private provisions and necessaries indispensable for so lengthened a trip as they anticipated. "Anybody would think we were buying these things for a station store," she said as she looked down at the long list of articles which Mr. Allerton had submitted to her husband for approval, all of which had yet to be purchased in Cairo and brought on board. "It puts me in mind of old days at Merradoolah, when I used to learn the prices of everything, so as not to make a mistake if the storekeeper was away, as he often was. Look here, Isabel!"

"Oh, how nice!" said Isabel, reading "Arrowroot, biscuits, bacon and butter, and marmalade. That sounds better, doesn't it, Marie? Curry powder, jams, jellies, red currant jelly, I like that; and preserved meat. One surely doesn't expect to eat all these things. Then there's soap, starch, tea and vinegar. Are we going to set up a shop in Upper Egypt, or open a grocery at Karnak?"

"Well, your father and I went down in a river steamer, to Adelaide once," said Mrs. Baldhill—"the Lower Murray isn't unlike the Nile where it runs between high limestone banks—and we were nearly starved, I can tell you, for want of a few of these very tins and preserved things that you're laughing at. It

was a dry season, so that the beef and mutton was that poor we could hardly eat it. The squatters wouldn't sell us any stores; they had mighty little themselves. I never was so bad off in my life, I can tell you, and don't want to be again."

"Well, we can't well be starved here, mother! There are flocks of wild fowl in the river, and both dad and Mr. Allerton are good shots. Besides we can make the Arabs get us things on shore. You had no Arabs on the Lower Murray; and oh! no ruins, no temples, no picturesque people with turbans and fezzes and spears, no robbers and murderers. What a lovely voyage we shall have!"

Another and yet another day passed by. There seemed to be no end to the requisites for the voyage. Everybody appeared to be riding on donkeys between Boulak, where the *Fatima* lay moored, and the city. Now it was a cask of oranges that was wanted, a basket of lemons, or a few sheep. Again some plants for the "ginnayn" or garden in the stern of the boat, which Isabel immediately descried and took under her rule and sway.

Then a soda-water machine was, beyond all things, indispensable, and Mr. Baldhill agitated for some cases of light Rhine wine, not holding coffee to be the one thing needful in the long days of sultry weather he foreboded.

Even wood had to be laid in. Charcoal answered for nearly every purpose; but for washing and baking, firewood such as cannot be obtained within reasonable distance of the banks of the river is necessary. Turkeys and fowls were likewise amongst the inhabitants of the miniature ark. When at last the *Fatima* spread her immense sails to the evening breeze, and commenced to stem the rapid current of the great river, her long pennants, smartly painted sides, and white blue-bordered canvas gave her a graceful and picturesque look. It was late in the afternoon when the start was made; towards sunset the breeze dropped, the sails were furled, and the towing-line temporarily adopted.

It was the eve's still hour. Behind the Pyramids the

sun's red-golden disc was slowly falling through the encrimsoned horizon. The boat's sails again slowly filled; she glided past palaces, gardens, embowered kiosks and dwellings white walled and slumberous in the softened light amid enormous cypresses and clustering palms. The little party having successfully completed their first evening meal on board, were joyous and animated. Penetrated by the strange beauty of the scene, they reclined or stood upon the deck, gazing upon the wondrous world of mystical oriental life which apparently glided by them.

"Oh! what a sight of sights!" said Isabel; "what a magical scene, is it not? I can see the Pyramids on our right, and how delicately clear against the sky the minarets of Cairo look as we leave them behind. The night breeze is becoming deliciously cool."

"A strangely beautiful scene," said Allerton; "how softened are all hard outlines. How smoothly our boat glides on now that our sails have filled again. We can still hear a murmur from the city. See, I will place our carpets and pillows on the deck for you ladies; we can then rest, muse and do full justice to the night, the land and its memories."

"Shall we always be as happy as this, I wonder?" said Isabel, looking up at the stars. "They used to have processions and worship Isis here, they say. Fancy crowds of white-robed forms on the palace steps leading down to the river! Arbaces was a priest of Isis, wasn't he, in that delightful *Last Days of Pompeii*? He was very grand though he was bad. There is something fascinating in wicked people after all. I wonder what the reason can be?"

"I remember having the same sort of feeling as a boy," said Allerton. "The grand, pitiless, fearless scoundrel interested me far more than the man of principle, who, fenced in by moral rule and measure, dared not permit himself the romantic latitude of the other. As one advances in experience the fallacy is exposed. Self-restraint, 'a clean heart and a right spirit within us,' above all the fixed mental gaze upon the seraph's brightest star, Faith, pure, undimmed, eternal—these are the true grandeurs and glories of

life, the noblest attainments of which the race is capable. The indulgences of the epicurean, the crimes of the scoffer, are but as the wallowings and combats of dragons in the slime of a half-created world."

"You place Faith on a celestial shrine," said Marguerite, who had listened attentively to Allerton's reply, more animated than was habitual to his reserved nature. "Do you think it possible for one still to cherish the belief in an over-ruling, all-beneficent Providence whose career has been but a descent from one undeserved misfortune to another?"

"I am not altogether a theologian," replied he; "but surely it is at the time of doubt, of despair even, that we should cling most tenaciously to the teachings of our youth. If the reason of things is apparent and we are encouraged, what merit is there? It is when all is dark and lowering that the mariner trusts to his compass, not when he sees the haven near, and the friendly beacon light."

"Surely it must be so," said Marguerite. "All nature teaches us that the seasons return, the winds rise or fall, the ocean flows or ebbs at His bidding. What are we—worms of the dust—that we cannot await the day of His coming? And we can always die rather than live ignobly."

"Who talks of dying?" said Isabel. "I know young people do sometimes as well as old ones, but what a dreadful thing it must be to die young. I feel as if I could live a thousand years. What a destiny—to sail for years on this wonderful river; to learn all about these palaces and temples and wonderful dead nations; to slumber under these palm trees, and wander under the silver moon! It would be a charmed life."

"I am not so very certain that the night air is good for young people," here interposed Mrs. Baldhill; "anyhow you must get used to it by degrees. Isabel, you and Marie had better come into the cabin. I daresay you'll soon be asleep. Father and Mr. Allerton are going to smoke their pipes. They'll be an hour or two yet. Mrs. Mortimer, you know your way to the bedroom."

"I feel disinclined to sleep for the present," said Marguerite. "I will join you in half an hour."

It was a night superbly beautiful, majestically brilliant, almost unreal in its loveliness. The lustrous, scintillating stars shone in the heavens with an intense and a burning splendour. The heart of Marguerite Gordon instinctively resisted sleep and the soothing influences of night. All was new, strangely stimulating, fantastic, in this warm aromatic air of the East. As the two men walked forward in low-toned converse, smoking as they walked, she threw herself upon one of the cane lounges, gazing with her whole soul into the darkly azure sky.

"Can I bring myself to believe," she said in her heart, "that I, Marguerite Gordon, am in truth my own true entity and actual self? As this barque glides along the current of this ancient river—on either side the vast monuments of the past, the ruins of the elder world—bearing me a solitary outcast from home and husband and children, can I realise that I ever enjoyed those entrancing joys and privileges—the rank of honoured matronhood, the love of children, the adoration of a husband? In a few short months all these treasures were reft, leaving me an alien and a wanderer, exposed to scorn and degradation, to misery and despair; and yet how innocent was I, have I ever been, of all thought of wrong, of any the least act against loyalty and love! It is hard—almost too hard to bear."

Then the thought once more recurring came over her—Would it not be permissible, rational, just that she should be free to heal her wounded heart, to accept the offer of a life's devotion if tendered to her by one worthy of love and respect? Would not again the heavens grow bright, the earth show fairer hues, could she but once more meet the loving glance, the heartfelt admiration from which she had so long been debarred?

Did she not know, could she not feel that the strength of her frame, her beauty of form and face, had been wonderfully restored to her? Whether owing to the healing power of the ocean breeze, the change of clime and circumstance, the leisure, the luxury of the dream-

life which of late she had led with her bounteous friends, her delicate and kindly benefactors, who could say? but once again her form was elastic, shapely, youthful. Grace had returned to her limbs, and beauty, the charm of a noble mind illumining those classic features, had again visited her form, while in the eyes of Bruce Allerton no woman with whom his wandering steps had brought him into habits of intimacy had ever displayed so fine a quality of intellect, so noble a nature, so lofty a spirit. His admiration for her natural charms was deep and fervent; but his appreciation of the diviner portions of her nature was a sentiment that in intensity and completeness far surpassed any feeling of attraction towards womanhood that he had previously experienced.

Long did Marguerite Gordon lie with her face to the stars, feeling as if her whole soul was drawn into communion with the planetary influences. Those stars upon which the thoughtful eyes of the great Jewish minister may have looked when the horror of a great famine was settling down upon the land: upon which Moses may have gazed when the great array of Israelites under his guidance turned their faces towards the desert and hastened across the narrow sea, beyond which lay the mysterious depths of the wilderness, and freedom. Hard by was the garden in which during the childhood of Moses the daughter of Pharaoh may have mused upon the traits of genius which doubtless distinguished the future judge and ruler of Israel. Pharaoh in his pomp and pride had looked upon them from beneath the silken awning of his galley, or perhaps questioned them in terror and despair, when at the bidding of the dread Sage of an oppressed people the first-born of the land lay dead—when the king's chamber, nay the king's very flesh, was no longer held sacred from pestilence, and the waters of the land were turned into blood.

"Ah, me!" thought the lonely woman, "does the lost idol of my heart bestow a thought on his long-buried Marguerite, as he deems her to be? Does her memory grow faint, ever fainter, until, lulled by the caresses of a newer bride, tender and true that she is, the old pain throbs not? And is this the end of all our love? This death in life! Must I bear about with me

this life-long burden, this corroding care, this sharp-edged sorrow, which, though at times fatigued into sleep, ever and anon wakes and cries, my God! how piteously, how bitterly! I am now—what a mockery it seems to count such grief as mine by years, say, rather, centuries—but my age, as the years are told, is only twenty-nine—twenty-nine! And I may live—yes, other people live—to sixty, or even seventy years. Ages of torture, æons of bitterness, cycles of despair. How can the bodily frame survive the perished soul, the dead, dead heart?"

As she raised her eyes again towards the heavens one star appeared to her excited senses to be more bright, more lambent of flame than the others. It glittered strangely as if about to shoot from its place. "He was right," she murmured. "And yonder is the star of Faith. May God in His infinite mercy grant that I may keep my eyes fixed upon the spirit-star of Faith! That I may embrace the cross until this frail body be worn with age; these eyes be dimmed and rayless!"

Then Marguerite Gordon arose and rejoined her companions in the small apartment, in which she found the sleeping girls dreaming the happy romances of unsaddened youth. Mrs. Baldhill had not composed herself as yet to sleep, being kept from slumber, as she said, by the washing of the water against the low sides of the boat and the occasional sharp bark of a jackal.

"The night's pleasant enough, but it's rather lonely at first. I'm glad you've come down, Mrs. Mortimer, I feel a sort of confidence in you. It takes a little time to make up your mind to this sort of thing. I daresay we shall feel more homely and settled when the sun gets up, and we can see round us for miles and miles. It's too wild and strange-like for my fancy just now."

CHAPTER XXIV

SUNRISE! with the glory and sudden splendour of morning. For one moment all is within the realm of night. In the next the day-god rushes forth, robed in purple flame. The o'ershadowing mist disperses. The wide river shimmers in the golden beam. Flocks of wild fowl rise, and with clanging cry scatter from the vicinity of strange man and his stranger abode. Afar shines the yellow carpet of the broad desert. The air is still cool, though in but a short hour the sun-rays will glow and radiate—not all harmlessly. The white-robed crew arise from the deck at the reis's loud command, and with an air as of returning to life after a death-like trance betake themselves to their work. On the shore the hundred forms of animal life are in motion. Horses are loosed and fed where a cluster of tents near a ruined temple marks an Arab encampment. The waterwheels creak and rattle. Children are shrilly noisy. She-goats are brought in to be milked. The long hot day has commenced. The short fair night of the East is over.

Mr. Allerton and his friend had dressed, bathed, and made themselves comfortable for the day: the coffee had been boiled, the bread displayed on snowy napkins, and certain preserved meats opened, before any of the ladies appeared.

Isabel, always active, vigorous, undismayed, recovering by each night's rest from any previous fatigue, however overpowering, was of course the first arrival. "Sunrise in Egypt, morning in the East!" she exclaimed. "Oh! what a splendid thing it is to be alive in such weather! How did you sleep, Mr. Allerton? I never turned round till daylight, I believe, when I heard the old reis call out 'Yallough!' Here come mother, Mrs. Mortimer, and that lazy Marie last of all."

"I must have smoked and dreamed far into the night," said Allerton. "When day broke I hardly seemed to have been asleep at all."

"The night must have been lovely. If mother had

not ordered me in," said Isabel, "I should never have gone to bed at all. All the same I feel the fresher for a good night's rest. And now, what are we to do to-day?"

"There is not much wind, so after breakfast we can go on shore and have a ramble. There's a lake near Acherusia; the Pyramid of Cheops, too, with wonderful palm avenues. We might have some shooting, and as probably the north wind will freshen to-morrow, we may as well have an easy day after the fatigue of embarkation."

The coffee—the very essence of the fragrant berry—was declared to be perfect, a sedative, a stimulant, all-satisfying at that early hour, under the fair blue sky, amid the dry, fresh, purest air. Far in the distance the desert proper could be descried, beyond the pyramid and the ruins of a temple—vast, silent, nameless, as are so many of the relics of the Land of Tombs. The breakfast was, on the whole, a most successful meal. Mrs. Baldhill had recovered her spirits and confidence with the sunlight, and was disposed to think that in all repects their voyage would be an improvement upon the unfortunate trip to South America, to which she was prone to allude.

"Certainly we shall not be badly off for a little game," said Allerton. "Look at the ducks, geese, pelicans on that sandspit. As soon as I get our breech-loaders to bear upon them, we shall have salmi of wild duck, roast goose and apple sauce, and pelican pie; this last delicacy for the crew."

"I should like one of those beautiful white herons' plumes," said Isabel; "and I must have the skin and beak of an Egyptian ibis. We have two kinds in Australia, the dark and the white. I wonder if these are larger? They come in a dry season with us."

"I wonder which of us will shoot the first crocodile?" said Allerton. "Baldhill, we must have a bet on it. It takes a well-placed bullet to kill the 'tilsearch,' doesn't it, Ibrahim?"

"If it be Allah's will," says the dragoman, "the English milord will kill the King of the Crocodiles."

"Oh, but I thought he lived above Denderah, and the Queen forty miles below."

"It is all written, he may be waiting for the bullet of the Bahaudur. His guns are not as the guns of common men."

"That's a delicate compliment to my shooting, Mrs. Baldhill, isn't it? But Villiers and I did make some good bags near Esneh, I think. We astonished the Arabs by shooting at gourds on each other's heads, or some such foolery. I feel rather ashamed of it now."

"Really! did you do anything so rash?" said Marguerite; "no wonder that foreigners think all Englishmen mad."

"Villiers was the best shot and the coolest fellow I ever saw," said the Australian. "I don't generally miss much myself either. 'Each man's fate is written,' says the Moslem. The risk was more apparent than real. All the same, I don't quite defend it—unless one of you ladies would like to see a little practice of the kind?"

"I think it would be great fun," said Isabel. "I'll hold an apple for Mr. Allerton to shoot at. To think of his missing an easy shot at a short distance like that!"

"I am afraid my nerves would not stand that test," said Allerton; "but I daresay we shall have more than one mark, living or dead, before our voyage ends, which will set the shooting question at rest."

So it was decided that the crew were to tow the dahabieh against the tide—a mild and toilsome performance—and the passengers were to spend the day on shore picnicking near the lake of Acherusia, the vicinity of which offered tempting opportunities for research and adventure.

Providing for the mid-day meal, and bringing one of the crew to bear the food basket, the little party set forth in a leisurely and desultory fashion, until they reached the palm forest which engirdles the lone lake.

"Villiers and I had a strange experience here," said Allerton. "Our guide left us, and we expected robbers. Seen at midnight, with the moon breaking through the darksome foliage, and fitfully illumining the gloomy waters, the promontory covered with ghostly limbs of blasted trees, what a subject it would have been for the weird genius of Edgar Poe! The lost Ulalume would here have received fitting burial—borne in a mystic

barque by ghostly rowers from behind yonder ink-black crags."

"Oh! what a terrible night you must have passed; what a perfectly Dantean spot!" said Isabel. "If it were not for the bright sun it would frighten one now. I must say I love the sun, even when he is a little hard on one's complexion—there's something cheering about him always. If it was not for dear old Phœbus this place would make one go mad with fear and melancholy. Look how the gold bars break into the tomb-like darkness. Is this any place in particular? But of course it is."

"The city of Memphis was somewhere about here," said Allerton; "but the desert keeps encroaching so that wonderful antiquities are annually swallowed up. The Temple of Vulcan was here too, and the colossal remains of figures in front are supposed to denote the spot."

"If we can manage to get down to the water's edge on the other side of that point," said Mr. Baldhill, "I see some water-fowl there."

"We can but try," said Allerton; "the ladies can follow at a distance."

Hiding themselves behind all the inequalities, and particularly being favoured by the shelter of a colossal figure of Rameses the Great, forty feet long and prone on his face, they approached the water's edge. Here they were sufficiently wary and successful to get within shot of a flock of blue Nile geese, which did not rise till within range, and then lost three of their number, Allerton dropping one to right and left, and Mr. Baldhill another. The birds were much admired—lighter than their tame congeners, but curiously bright of plumage, and when young, tender and far from despicable.

Isabel and Marie roamed about, until the former declaring herself to be tired, insisted upon sitting down upon the torso of Rameses the Great.

"Poor fellow, he can't hurt us now," she said; "and there is such a lovely view from him. Just stand on the small of his back, Marie, and you can see the Pyramid of Cheops. How vast it is, and the avenue of palm trees is really 'an alley Titanic,' as that glori-

ous Edgar Allan says. Don't you remember it, Mrs. Mortimer, in *Ulalume*?

> 'Then I roamed through an alley Titanic
> With Psyche, with Psyche, my soul.'

He must have been here, I am certain."

"I am not certain whether Poe ever travelled in the East," said Marguerite; "but his imagination was sufficient to supply the lack of experience."

"Well, if he only came here and listened to these great palms rustling, and heard the dark water splashing at midnight on these black rocks, he would need no further inspiration to put before his readers 'the night's Plutonian shore,' would he?"

"My dear Isabel you should not let such morbid fancies get into that pretty head of yours—what have sepulchral images, sorrow, and despair in common with a happy child like you, whose presence is sunshine, and whose future not less bright in anticipation?"

"How do we know?" said Isabel; "all sorts of things might happen. Besides it's a delicious thing to be melancholy occasionally. It is a natural kind of relief; and which makes the bright part of your lot shine brightly in comparison. Isn't that another pyramid in the distance? One would think it rained pyramids now and then in the old times, they are so plentiful."

"Does it not seem more and more bewildering?" said Marguerite. "Where are the people who built these wonderful edifices, idols, and structures? Only a mere fringe of population remains about the river. In the desert are the same hunters and warriors as in the days of Ishmael. They never built these palaces, these temples."

"It is the fulfilment of prophecy, if we could only see it," said Mrs. Baldhill, who had been consulting her Bible. "Doesn't it say, 'Noph shall be desolate, and the land shall be destitute of that whereof it was full'? It has all come to pass. And this is the end of it. It's all quite plain if you believe the Scriptures."

"I believe the Scriptures," said Marguerite gently;

"but I can't quite see that that prophecy has been literally fulfilled. The same kind of gradual extinction of power and population has happened to many Eastern cities. But with regard to the whole scope and tendency of prophetic declaration I am, of course, quite on your side."

About this time the servant had, in obedience to a hint from Mrs. Baldhill, spread a cloth and prepared the lunch. Every one's appetite was surprisingly good. Isabel feasted and chatted as usual. The claret and soda-water, brought in a large water-cooler, were declared to be perfect. They found a spot abundantly cool, even dark, under the shade of a mighty palm, and partly shaded by a portico, which seemed to be the entrance to a temple not intended for ordinary humanity. Every one drank, ate, laughed and jested. Even Mrs. Baldhill declared she was getting as much used to Egypt as to Double Bay, and that she had no doubt that she would soon feel quite at home in any part of Palestine.

Their nook was so delightfully shaded from the sun —now somewhat oppressive—that the short twilight was nearly over when they regained the bank of the Nile, and opposite a small cape or promontory they saw the tall masts of their brightly ornamented boat.

The river flowed past them, and beyond was the usual strip of vivid verdure, palms, acacias, all rose-tinged in the evening sky. The minarets of Cairo were faintly visible. All nature seemed hushed and restful. With next day's progress the real voyage of the *Fatima* may have been said to have fairly begun. The wind was favourable, but not sufficiently strong to create uneasiness of mind or motion. The *cuisinerie*, by the aid of Allerton's energetic remonstrances backed up by Ibrahim's vigorous language, had improved in quality and punctuality. As the voyagers from a far land sat upon cushions under their awning, which admitted the breeze while excluding the sun, with books and maps beside them, a wave of lively, and by no means uninstructive conversation passed around. There were alternations of interest too. From time to time a tempting shot would present itself, and an

enormous pelican, at a considerable distance, was one of the first victims to Allerton's deadly aim. It was resolved however, after this sacrifice, that only edible and necessary victims should be laid low; Isabel's real, true, and veritable Egyptian ibis being made the sole exception.

"These Egyptian fellows worked the frontage well in the old times, you can see," quoth Mr. Baldhill, scanning the scene as they swept by. "Every yard of the alluvial was kept for cultivation, and the villages were all pushed out back on those hills that run in a line with the river. They must have had a long walk to get to their work, or perhaps they made their donkeys carry them."

"When the population was as dense as it must have been to judge from the crop of temples, obelisks, and pyramids," said Allerton, "every yard of arable ground was too valuable to build on. Now you see clusters of hovels amid the fields, which, depend upon it, were not there in Pharaoh's time."

"Can't we go and see a live village to-day?" said Isabel. "I feel tired of dead places. I want to see the women, and children, and chickens, and the free-selector element in all its glory, when they've had a few centuries to stock upon."

"Wait till we get to Mineyeh," said Allerton."

"How long shall we be getting there?" asked the impatient damsel. "A week?"

"About that time, unless we have wonderfully steady breezes."

"And are we to do nothing but lie on the deck and talk and look at the water, and the crops, the same desert, the eternal blue sky? I should go out of my mind. What do you say, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"I think you will have to adapt yourself to circumstances, my dear; but may not some compromise be arrived at? Is there any danger in a walk to one of these villages every day? There is so much to be seen there, and learned too."

"Well, if you are very determined," said Allerton, relenting slightly, "it seems that Ibrahim makes excursions to one or other of them in search of fresh eggs,

poultry, milk, and other housekeeping trifles, so I think we may join him as escort. They will only think us a little mad for going out in the sun, but as that is their received opinion about all English persons whatsoever, it matters the less."

"I call that very nice of you," said Isabel, delighted at the prospect of renewed freedom. "Long live King Robert the Bruce! By the way, your name is Robert, isn't it? I remember seeing your signature, R. Bruce Allerton."

"Royal blood runs in these veins," said Allerton, half mockingly. "My mother, Eleanor Bruce, could trace her pedigree in direct descent from King Robert."

"How very nice," said Isabel. "I'm afraid our pedigree is not quite so long or satisfactory. I should have to be entered at a race meeting, 'Isabel, ch. f., pedigree unknown.' Not quite so bad as that, though, is it, dad?"

"I'm not one of those people who run down birth and breeding because they haven't any of their own," said Mr. Baldhill thoughtfully. "It's a good thing, and I'd like to be able to say, like our old squire that father used to talk about, that his ancestor, Sir Edric, rode alongside of King Harold at Hastings. But my father and grandfather were honest yeomen; they and theirs had lived on the same land in England as long as any one could remember. And in Australia a man that keeps his word and goes straight, and can pay his way, isn't much looked down upon however he happens to be bred."

"Dear old dad!" said the impetuous Isabel, rushing at him and throwing her arms round his neck, while she smothered him with kisses. "You don't think that I could say anything to hurt your feelings, do you? I'd love you better than any one else in the world even if you'd been a hut-keeper."

"I may have been that, for all you know," smiled Mr. Baldhill, "or a shepherd. Many a good fellow's had to take to that when remittances ran short. I've seen the Honourable Augustus Howard shepherding a flock of old ewes, and Captain Grant, that's in the Carabineers, hut-keeping for him. Begged me to lend

him a fig of tobacco, he did. But there's no use in fretting about these things, my dear. Nobody ever looked down upon your old dad for having had to work hard in his day; and they won't be likely to say much to you, will they?"

"It's very wicked of me, I know," pouted Isabel; "but I feel as if I had noble blood in my veins, and I'm naturally of an aristocratic turn of mind. I suppose it's from having had everything I wanted in this world ever since I could speak, and never having to go without. It's a wonder I haven't been spoiled more than I have; isn't it, Mrs. Mortimer?"

Here the girl looked at Mrs. Mortimer with such a plaintive appeal that she could hardly help laughing, and but that she saw that the sensitive nature of her pupil was deeply stirred, would have made a jesting answer.

"The good God has given you much, my dearest Isabel," she said softly, drawing to her the sweet, half-tearful face, with childish tears in the bright eyes, and caressing her with maternal tenderness; "you have the kindest of parents, and loving friends; every wish of your heart is fulfilled or anticipated—what more can you want? Are you going to cry for the moon, or the lost diadem of Isis? I did not think you were such a baby!"

"It *is* foolish of me, I know," she said, laying her head on the breast of her consoler; "but still it is hard. If only father had run away from his family when he was young, and turned out to belong to a noble race. But that can never be. I am sure some people will despise me for it, and it makes me feel so miserable."

"Take the other side of the question," said Marguerite soothingly. "In your country there are parents who, with equal wealth, have taken little trouble to bring up their children well—have never given them the unusual advantages which have been showered upon you. You have known such, have you not?"

"Oh, yes, numbers of them. The M'Gowans used to do all their own work—wash, and scrub, and bake, and everything. Not that one mightn't do that on a pinch; but they were very rough. And the Watertons

were worse, too. Mary Waterton used to shepherd till she was quite a big girl."

"Their fathers were rich, too?"

"Rich! Old M'Gowan died worth about half-a-million, and the Watertons had about twenty thousand each, and there were a good many of them too."

"And do you suppose that any of them felt uncomfortable or inclined to reproach Providence for their want of blue blood?"

"I know what you mean, and I'm a naughty, wicked girl," said Isabel, still sobbing, and clinging to her kind philosopher and friend; "but they hadn't the sense to feel it. I'm like Miss Falkner's black boy. She had spent years in teaching him to read and say his catechism, and she was scolding him one day, and saying how ungrateful he was after she'd taught him. 'I wish you'd never taught me anything,' he said, facing round on her. 'Oh, Charlie!' says she, quite shocked. 'Yes,' he said, 'before you taught me in the book I didn't know that I was wicked. Now I do, and I'm miserable.' That's my case. If I hadn't been 'carefully educated,' as Miss Chillingham used to say, I shouldn't have troubled myself about trifles of this kind. But I see Ibrahim is making ready to start for the village. A good long walk will take some of the nonsense out of me. After all, these fits don't last long with me. Reason asserts her sway. But it's done me ever so much good to talk my heart out. You understand me, my dear Mrs. Mortimer, and I shall always be grateful to you for it."

These morning walks to the village, while they afforded the means of exercise and the chance of adventure which the ardent spirit and tameless temperament of Miss Baldhill required, were in themselves highly enjoyable rambles. After the first, they made a point of starting at sunrise, so as to escape the heat of the day, which began to be oppressive before ten o'clock. A single cup of coffee formed the early refreshment, akin to the "chotah hazree" of the Anglo-Indian. After which they returned to bath and breakfast luxuriously.

Isabel and her companions chiefly elected to explore the villages, to talk in gradually improving Arabic to

the women who had fowls, eggs, and milk to sell; to pat the heads of the brown, naked children, to make their eyes gleam with an occasional piastre, and to receive presents of fresh dates and flowers. At other times they would be attracted by the sight of a lone obelisk among the palm groves, or come suddenly upon a ruined temple or a lost pyramid, out of the beaten track of travellers, a memorial of long-past ages, bearing inscriptions in an unknown language of perished races and forgotten nations.

CHAPTER XXV

"How happily the days of Thalaba went by."

THE time glided on as smoothly and flowingly for that well-matched party of travellers as the river tide upon whose broad bosom their boat floated. For them there was no march of time, no summons to work or trouble, no hint of care, no echo of strife from the busy, anxious world which lay beyond, behind them. They sailed away farther and yet farther from the realms of time and sorrow, labour and circumstance, into a kingdom where these foes of humanity had no power to enter. Day after day slipped by in the same dreamy luxury of thought; the same noiseless yet swift uniformity. Had it not been for Mrs. Baldhill's careful notation and rigid adherence to the daily lessons of the rubric, the Sundays would have passed unnoticed, unheeded, in that Arcadian time, when all days were Sabbaths of rest and peaceful enjoyment.

So lost themselves the charmed hours until Menieh, one of the most interesting cities on the Nile, was reached. Here the party went ashore and made divers explorations and discoveries. But the wind being fair, it was decided to make for Siout, the capital of the Said, or Upper Egypt, where many things much better worth seeing were promised by Ibrahim and Mr. Allerton. Among the novelties was a real slave-market. There

was news, too, of a large caravan having recently arrived from Darfur across the desert.

"I wonder whether we could buy a slave?" said Isabel. "I don't see why we shouldn't. It would be splendid to have him to wait at table, or ride after one on horseback in a red turban; what an effect it would have! I must have one, dad, and that's all about it."

"I don't see what harm it would be," said Mr. Baldhill, considering the subject with a view to compromise as usual. "If we get him reasonable, at store price, as one might say, he would owe us nothing in a couple of years. By that time he'd learn enough to give warning or stop on altogether."

"The Turkish laws do not allow of slaves being bought by an infidel," said Allerton. "Still, there's no reason why we should deny ourselves any trifling pleasure on this excursion. I daresay it can be arranged."

"That's splendid," said Isabel, clapping her hands in despite of Marguerite's warning looks. "You don't know how I respect people who don't make difficulties. It is so commonplace to put obstacles in the way always."

"He can easily come on board and mix with the sailors," said Allerton; "though if we are all put in prison by the Governor of Upper Egypt it will be your fault, Miss Isabel, and I hope you'll bear your share philosophically."

Leaving the *Fatima* safely moored at El Hamra, the adventurous portion of the party proceeded in a leisurely way along the causeway bordered by plane trees which leads to the town of Siout proper. The city boasts of a cotton factory and other manufactories, of baths and bazaars, rather out of proportion to its general appearance and architecture.

Isabel, however, was all impatience to behold the slave-market, and gave no one rest or peace until after Ibrahim had interviewed a forbidding-looking personage, the Jelaub, a slave merchant himself. By dint of much argument and a certain expenditure of piastres, besides volunteering the information that Bruce Allerton was the son of the Governor-General of India, and that

Mr. Baldhill was about to purchase all the cotton factories in Upper Egypt, which would act beneficially upon the slave-market as stimulating the demand for the human article, permission was obtained to inspect the stock.

When they entered the great courtyard of which the outer gate was so jealously guarded, a strange and inhuman sight presented itself—one which those who beheld it never forgot, nor ceased to recall in their dreams. Standing or lying about were nearly three hundred slaves of different ages and sexes. Ragged and scanty was their wretched clothing, haggard and woebegone their looks—manifestly weak and wasted, their limbs and bodies were scarred with the marks of cruelty and ill-usage.

Many of the women, particularly the younger girls, were handsome ; some had superb figures, looking like bronze statuary. But one and all had the wistful look of those to whom justice had long been denied, to whom wrong and oppression in their harshest forms had been familiar.

They showed wounds from manacles. Weals and half-healed cuts from the terrible "kurbash," or hide whip, were common on their arms. The backs and bodies of the drove presented occasionally a sickening appearance. Ibrahim, on being appealed to, shrugged his shoulders and gravely informed the shocked Britons that "serious loss had taken place on the overland journey ; that those who survived needed hard driving ; that it was doubted if the Jelaub would be able to get his money back! Many of the most valuable slaves had died on the road. Those who were left were a sorry sample of the splendid Kafileh which had left Darfur."

"These are the woes of slaves—
They glare from the abyss,
They cry from unknown graves,
'We are the witnesses,'"

quoted Isabel, with choking voice and heaving breast. "How can such things be permitted! Why does England allow it? Didn't Gordon hang one of these

men-stealers? What a pity he is not Governor of the Said now!"

"From what Ibrahim says, he may have some trouble on his own account soon," said Allerton. "You remember Burton telling us he had been despatched to Khartoum, and that he had some idea that it was possible he might be deserted by his troops and find himself in danger? 'I know the Egyptian army, as it is called,' he said, 'you might as well send ten thousand sheep to attack a troop of wolves as those soulless cravens to cross swords with the fierce horsemen of the desert. They will fall down and die of fright, if they are not too paralysed with fear to run away. Their officers will simply be massacred. The name of Gordon Pasha is a host in the desert. But he is utterly fearless, even to foolhardiness—religious to the verge of fanaticism—and unless the Gladstone Government acts with more promptness than usual his life will be wasted.'"

"In the meantime, we must release at least one captive out of this hall of sorrow," said Isabel, who was becoming quite Eastern in her expressions; "and I will have one of those poor little dots of girls. Did you ever see a more thorough picture of misery than that little thing with the big eyes and the cut on her arm?"

"How are we to bring a girl with us?" said Mr. Baldhill. "You don't consider things, pussy."

"She can sleep at our feet in the cabin," said Isabel peremptorily. "And if she is miserable in Australia, we can send her back. If she's an orphan, I'll take her."

As she approached the small victim of tyranny, a pretty child of ten years of age, worn and wan with the journey, and with a cruel cut on the upper arm which showed where the thong had fallen more than once, a gleam of hope passed into the chattel's sad eyes. She arose, and coming timidly forward, kissed the hand of her possible benefactress.

"Poor baby!" said Mr. Baldhill; "think of girls and boys like that being driven along like cows and calves! What eyes she has too! Who's that boy making signs to her?"

As the worthy man spoke he pointed to a slender stripling with more than usually regular features, who was evidently signalling to the little girl from the other side of the hall.

"Ask him what he is, and why he speaks to the child," said Isabel to Ibrahim.

After a short colloquy in Arabic, of which it appeared the youth understood a few words, Ibrahim informed his employer that the young man and child were brother and sister, the children of a chief whose village had been sacked through the machinations of an Arab slave-dealer—the wholesale merchant who had ordered and paid for the consignment in advance; that his mother, father, and elder brothers had either been killed in the raid or died from hardship on the road. Here he held up his own scarred, hardly-healed wrists. He and Ayesha were alone left.

This decided the impulsive Isabel in completing the purchase. As the young Nubian spoke of the wrongs of his father's house to the impassive Ibrahim his eyes flashed and his bosom heaved. He looked as if once more he could have led his father's warriors, and pointed to his breast, upon which more than one cicatrix was visible. "He was not intended to be a slave," said Isabel. "What do you think, Mrs. Mortimer?

'The scars his dark broad bosom bore
Showed warrior true and brave,
A prince among his tribe before,
He could not be a slave!'

I wonder what the child's name is?" she said.

Ibrahim made a query, and the answer, softly murmured, was "Ayesha."

After a conference with Ibrahim of rather a lengthened nature, Allerton informed Mr. Baldhill there would be no insurmountable obstacles in the way of their taking their new purchases with them, if the sale were effected. The boy would easily amalgamate with the crew; if he proved willing to learn, as many of his tribe were, he would be well worth the money paid for him.

"As for the 'bint,'" Ibrahim said, "the woman-child Ayesha, she could lie on the floor next to her

mistress's couch by night and fan her by day. There was room for her; she was small and young; she would be a plaything for the khanum; why should she not have her?"

The prices were finally adjusted, several offers having been "taxed" by Ibrahim, and a bag of piastres, to the value of thirty pounds, was accepted for the boy Omar. Ayesha was valued considerably cheaper; indeed at rather less than half-price.

When they returned to the *Fatima*, after a fatiguing exploration of the not over-clean town, the released captives—having first been taken to a bazaar and clad, so to speak, in purple and fine linen—humbly followed their new master and mistress.

"That ever I should live to be a slaveholder!" cried Isabel with great delight. "Isn't it glorious? Of course, I should never have been wicked enough to buy them if I didn't intend to do them good in every way. But really, it is a delightful sensation to own a couple of your fellow-creatures, body and soul. I feel like a noble Egyptian lady already."

"I trust that you will remember that *noblesse oblige*," said Marguerite. "There must be no more childish ways, petulant impatience of history readings, and so on."

"Oh!" said Isabel, loftily, "I feel quite a changed person. I am certain something romantic will happen to us before we return from Upper Egypt. How delightful it sounds! Perhaps Omar, that is his name, Ibrahim says, will turn out faithful and devoted, and save my life. He has an expression of courage, and all that. He looks just like the Saracen Emir in *The Talisman*."

"You mustn't invest him with all the romantic virtues before he has been tried," said Allerton much amused. "Some of these Nubian slaves are awful scoundrels, and the Arabs too, in spite of Lady Duff Gordon; but I confess I like the look of this one, so I will reserve my judgment."

The young Nubian in question had a remarkable appearance. Slight, graceful, and well-knit, although wretchedly emaciated, there was an air of dignity, of courageous endurance, in his every look and gesture.

His features, of Arab type, were high and noble, while his eyes—large, dark, and melancholy—seen when lit up by a momentary gleam of passion, were somewhat Moorish in expression. When told by his master that he was purchased, and that the young unveiled Frankish lady was his possessor, he walked over and, kneeling down, gravely kissed her feet. He then arose, led the child Ayesha to her, and caused her to go through the same ceremony. Standing then humbly with downcast eyes, they awaited the next command.

The party moved away, and at a word from Ibrahim they followed. The remaining slaves raised a wild, half-wondering, half-farewell cry, while tears rushed to eyes which pain and cruelty had been unable to soften.

As they passed towards the river and met the accustomed files of female domestic slaves carrying their water-jars, a smile of thankfulness lighted up the face of Ayesha, and she pressed closer to the heels of Isabel, as if already she recognised in her a protectress.

"I wonder what else you will insist upon taking with you?" said Marguerite. "Really you are the most over-indulged little girl I ever came across or even heard of. We must hope you won't require Mr. Baldhill to carry back a pyramid to Australia."

"My dear Mrs. Mortimer, what is the good of talking in that way? Isn't money intended to give happiness to people that have it? It's dad's chief pleasure in life to see me happy. If I only go straight, that's all he wants; and hasn't he more money than he knows what to do with? Then why grudge me trifles like these?"

Marguerite sighed as she thought of the gloomy homes which she had seen, where abundance of money did not indeed promote happiness to any dweller therein; while here was this bright creature permitted to flit from one pleasure to another, like a humming-bird amid jewelled flowers, to possess and embody every wish of her heart, wholly irrespective of the cost!

And after all, as she said, what did it matter? Mr. Baldhill was repaid by the sparkle of joy which a gratified wish made glitter in his darling's eyes for any pecuniary outlay—not sacrifice, as is the ordinary phrase. He was indeed exceptionally rich, even in a land where

the shepherd kings are fabulously so. Mrs. Baldhill reposed absolute trust in her husband's sagacity, which she had never known fail, and was only concerned as to Isabel's educational and religious welfare. Being in a general way satisfied that there was no serious risk of heterodoxy, and strong in trust of her child's truthful and fearlessly honest nature, she rarely disapproved of apparently the most unusual fancies and proceedings.

When, therefore—for she and Marie had elected to remain on board reading and performing certain necessary needlework—she perceived the African strangers following behind Isabel, and heard her call out as she sprang on board "Mother, mother! these are my slaves. Dad let me buy them. They are my very own," she manifested no deeper emotion of surprise than if they had been a couple of macaws.

She only said. "Well, I do wonder what you will take into your head next! I'm afraid father's spoiling you; but between him and Mrs. Mortimer and Mr. Allerton I suppose it'll all come right. I sha'n't trouble my head about them. But you won't want anything else, pet, will you?"

"Only an Arab horse," said the still unsated maiden; "or perhaps a pair; but there'll be time enough to think of that. I want to take the shine out of Mrs. Howard's Ahmed and Zorayda, that we saw at the Singleton Show. That's all. I'll ride him there, and have his mane dyed with henna. Then I'll lay me down and die; won't I, Marie?"

No great time was taken for providing for the lodging of the distinguished strangers. Ibrahim said a few words to the reis, who in turn spoke to the crew. Omar went to the forecastle, and putting his hand to one of the ropes pulled it with a slight motion, as if to show familiarity with its use.

"That chap's half a sailor," said Mr. Baldhill. "Wherever did he see a rope in his country, except a tent rope?"

"He may have been born near one of the lakes," said Allerton, "or on one of the great rivers. They have big enough boats there, but we must wait till he picks

up a little more Arabic and we shall have all his history?"

"Is he a Christian or a Mohammedan?" said Mr. Baldhill. "It doesn't matter, I suppose, but I should like to know."

"Ibrahim can ask him that," said Allerton. "The answer will be short."

A few words caused the captive to look earnestly and solemnly at the stranger white men, at the crew, at the heavens. Then he sank on one knee, and making the sign of the cross, rapidly repeated a short prayer, and rose.

"It is as I expected," said Allerton; "he is an Abyssinian Christian, perhaps a subject of King John."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Baldhill; "there will be some comfort in teaching them things, particularly Aisha, if that's her name. I suppose she's the same."

"She is his sister," said Allerton after a fresh inquiry was made. "They are the only survivors of the family. The rest were either killed when the village was attacked by the chief who sold them, or died on the journey over. The road is plainly enough marked by the bones of the miserable creatures who drop and are abandoned to the eagles, they tell me."

"And now, what about your voyage?" said Mr. Baldhill. "I rather like the place, there seem to be two or three spots to look at. Suppose we stay a day or two here and take it easy, and then push on for what-do-you-call it?"

"There's no objection that I know of," said Allerton. "Keneh and Assouan come next. There was a grand old Turkish Governor there when we stopped there last. Here we have the Stabl d'Autar, and a number of wonders worth seeing once at any rate. We had better begin to write our home letters now, as Keneh is the last town with regular communications and a reliable post-office."

So the voyagers remained stationary for the remaining days of that tranquil, long-remembered week. They roamed through the lofty halls, and gazed with awe upon the richly-coloured pictures of the Stabl d'Autar, that colossal tomb-temple,

wonderful amid wonders. They saw the grand level panorama, bounded by the hills of ancient Libya, green, fertile, and river-nourished. Mr. Baldhill had a shot at a crocodile, which he hit in an apparently vital portion of the body, but did not succeed in bagging. Stuffed specimens were offered to him for sale by the Arabs, and it was suggested that he might carry one to Australia as a trophy, but he repudiated the transaction as disingenuous.

The weather during the stay of the passengers of the *Fatima* was beyond all description lovely. The great heat of summer seemed tempered by an unfailing breeze which rose towards evening and permitted rambling by river and plain.

Sometimes Allerton and Mr. Baldhill took their guns and managed very fair bags from the red-legged partridges and quail amid the crops. Till mid-day, Isabel sat patiently working, or reading by turns with Marguerite the instructive books, chiefly relating to Egypt and the East, which were *de rigueur* in the morning.

Nor was the life monotonous on board the dahabieh. There was always something happening so strange to English eyes that a constant state of surprise and interest was kept up. One day a raft filled with beehives would float slowly past. It is considered expedient by the bee-masters of Upper Egypt to give their bees change of air, scene, and flowers. Whereby they float up and down the river and the bees are expected to find their own boat, although it may have drifted several miles since they quitted their hive in the morning.

Then, again, a floating dwelling went by with the tide, made up, as it seemed to them, of mugs and jugs, pitchers and jars, large enough to hide Morgiana herself. There is a large manufactory at Keneh, and the simple proprietors of this hollow-ware were floating down river to a market upon the products of their industry.

And more than once, alas! they saw boats covered with another species of merchandise. These were crowded with slaves on their way from the central African rearing grounds to the ever-ready market for human goods at Cairo. They did not look sad, but

Allerton said it was known that numbers of the younger ones used to drown themselves on the voyage. They looked wistfully at the *Fatima's* crew ; Omar and Ayesha gazed mournfully at them, and then the child threw herself at the feet of Isabel, and clasping them, sobbed for very joy and gratitude.

CHAPTER XXVI

After this halcyon period, on which the wayfarers often looked back in other years, came to an end it was decided that all expedition should be used until Keneh was reached. There everybody promised themselves a full day's letter-writing for Europe. It would be their last chance of correspondence with the civilised world. On their arrival the Turkish Governor decided to visit the noble Inglesi whose wealth was so great, whose manners were so courteous—above all, whose brandy was superb, as Ibrahim had duly reported. Mustapha Bey, a grand-looking, solemn Moslem, with a patriarchal silvery beard, accordingly came on board in great state, accompanied by his janissary and pipe-bearer. He sat down gravely on an extemporised divan, and, Ibrahim being secured as an interpreter, conversation ensued. First of all he paid compliments to Isabel, Mrs. Baldhill, Marguerite, and Marie, whose charms he averred would be sufficient to cause any of the faithful (here he indicated himself) to believe that he had passed from this world and was surrounded by houris.

This being translated, Isabel requested Ibrahim to tell him that he was a dear old creature, and also to thank him on the part of her mother, who had not been called a houri for ever so many years.

The Governor bowed and stroked his beard gravely. He next desired to know whether Allerton's wife was of the party, or whether Isabel and Marie both bore that relation to him.

His misconception being set right he relinquished the

domestic question, and asked Allerton if he had heard of the troubles in Alexandria.

Allerton's face assumed an altered expression when Ibrahim interpreted this important query.

"No! What has happened? They had heard nothing."

The Governor: "Wonderful ashes have fallen upon our heads. That dog, Arabi Bey, son of a burnt father, has spoken evil to the fellahs and budmashes of the land. They have arisen to revolt against the Khedive, against the Sultan, and against the Inglesi. May their fathers' graves be defiled."

"And what has been done by the English?"

The Governor: "Great warships have come to the city of Iskender, under the command of Seh-mohr Bey. He will blow every stone, he tells them, every roof from the houses, if Arabi does not eat dirt. But the foolish people have banded together. They commence to revile—to plunder the merchants. May Allah destroy them!"

Allerton: "They will be repaid. They will be blown into the tops of the minarets. I know Beauchamp Seymour. He is the man to keep his word. All is over now. Arabi is doubtless a fugitive."

The Governor: "May Allah direct! But there is also evil counsel in the desert. A prophet, El Mahdi, has arisen. He is called the successor of Mahomet. He has vowed to drive the infidels out of the land altogether."

Allerton: "He also will soon be overcome. A mere rabble of Arabs! But this tumult in Alexandria and Cairo is more serious. I am glad we are not there now."

The Governor: "Allah would doubtless have preserved you. He has you in his favour. I will take another glass of this rose-liqueur, and a small quantity in a bottle for a sick relative. May you be under the guidance of Allah! Be sure and visit me on your return. I will give you a guard, if necessary, to protect you from evil men."

Upon this, followed by his janissary and pipe-bearer, with the deepest gravity, good worthy old Mustapha

Bey took his departure, walking with great stateliness until he reached his handsome Arab charger, upon whose saddle he ascended with slight difficulty and rode solemnly away.

After the Governor had departed, Allerton's conference with Ibrahim apparently took an exceptionally serious turn. This coming to an end, he sought out Mr. Baldhill and communicated his misgivings.

"I don't like the look of matters at all," he said. "Sinclair and I heard a good deal last year which Englishmen don't generally get the benefit of. Ibrahim told us that more would come of it. He believes the worst is not over. There will be a general break out, first in the cities, then in the desert."

"What had we better do?" said Mr. Baldhill, looking rather blank.

"As it turns out we cannot be in a better place. All the fighting, if there is any, will be in and around Cairo and Alexandria. It will take time to come this way."

"Hadn't we better go on, since we cannot go back just yet?"

"That is my idea; Ibrahim says we cannot be in a better place, and counsels our going on to Philæ, as we intended. The rising in the desert is what we have most reason to fear. But, if the worst comes, we can get across from here to Cosseir on the Red Sea, it is only seventy miles, and take ship from there. Ibrahim knows the road well."

"I don't think anything has astonished me more in this world," said Mr. Baldhill. "I thought these Egyptians were as safe to keep quiet as our own black fellows. It's no use telling the ladies, is it? It will take all the pleasure out of their trip."

"No use in the world. If real danger crops up, of course they must be prepared; but as nothing may come of it, it would be cruel to spoil their enjoyment. Listen to your daughter and the little Frenchwoman laughing."

This outbreak of mirth was occasioned by a proceeding of little Ayesha, who was daily recovering health and spirits. The child had volunteered to perform a dance, and the contrast between her mirthful

motions and small, attenuated frame had been irresistible.

The wind now, as if in unison with their wishes, sent them swiftly up the river past Thebes, the glories of which, with Karnak and Luxor, they left to be enjoyed on their return. But little halt was made until they arrived beneath the narrowing hills, the deep silent glens, the tower-crowned heights which mark the ancient Syene. Here is the gate of the widely-renowned valley of the Nile. Here was once one of the great cities of the ancient world where still towering obelisk and Titanic temple ruins tell of the splendour faded and the glory passed away for ever! The tracks of chariot wheels, death-rusted a thousand years since, mark the borders of the narrow streets. Inscriptions and hieroglyphs look as if freshly cut and graven on these wondrous ruins but yesterday.

Only a crowd of simple Nubian villagers appears to represent the warrior population that has perished; only a form of tyranny still survives in a troop of newly-arrived slaves—marking an imperishable injustice where nobler attributes have sunk into oblivion.

Here a truce was called for a while to saunterings by the mighty river, to musings in the crimson eve, or the hushed, charmed midnight. One of the great adventures of the Nile voyager, the ascent of the First Cataract, is imminent, and no less exciting a topic can be tolerated.

The first indispensable diplomatic move was for Ibrahim to interview the Reis of the Cataract, so that between the high contracting parties all preliminaries should be carefully settled. The boat has to be unloaded; that is a minor and unimportant detail. The cargo has to be packed upon camels so as to be transported landwards towards Philæ. Three plenipotentiaries had arrived. They were soon seated in conclave. Ere the torrent of Arab utterance commences, they are calm, grandly silent, impassive as the Sphynx. They are the Sheik, the Reis, and the Pilot of the Cataract.

Soon was the silence dispelled. Ibrahim and the three spare, swart elders, who sat there like the friends

of Job, commenced quietly; but gradually warming in argument began to scream, to gesticulate, to threaten, to denounce. An hour of this sort of work passed, before progress was apparently made. All suddenly, however, the congress broke up, like that historical one of Berlin, with decided and portentous results. The bargain to see the *Fatima* safely over the Cataract was concluded; the sum was agreed on, not much under a hundred and fifty francs. For this sum they were to be carried up, which was difficult and toilsome—to be floated down, which was delicately risky. Allerton was satisfied. "We paid fifty francs more the last time, but for some reason or other they are less grasping now. Ibrahim says he can't make them out, unless a movement is impending. However, we must see Philæ or die. The return voyage will be less adventurous."

The wind, as it chanced, was free and favourable. The *Fatima* glided fast up stream, amid the dark red granite cliffs that menace the bank. The pilot of the Cataract had taken the helm, so that general confidence reigned among the passengers. "What a calm air of decision this fellow has!" said Allerton. "He was born amid these rocks and rapids, doubtless; but what amazing dexterity he shows!"

"It is grand and exciting," replied Isabel. "I always admire pilots at sea, in a river, anywhere. Look at that old Arab—he is going to dive. Surely, oh! surely, we must run against that cliff. And how the water boils! The boat will be carried on to it and sink."

It was a supreme moment. The whole of the party stood gazing at the rock—at the boiling rapid—at the statuesque Arab as he stood erect for one moment, then plunged headlong into the hissing foam. Emerging like a swart river-god upon the rock, he received the bow of the *Fatima* upon his immovable shoulder; as from a tree the boat recoiled, and grazing the dreaded peril glided into a pool of scarce ruffled wavelets.

"Was there ever anything so splendid?" cried Isabel. "These Arabs are noble either on land or water. I thought we were lost and that the boiling eddy must be a maelstrom. Do you remember the

'Death of King Haco?' I used to think it sublime when we were at school:

> 'He grasped the wheel with a giant's grasp;
> But were he ten thousand men,
> In vain that moveless wheel might he clasp,
> Earth's millions were nothing then.'

It seems to me the Ishmaelite can score off the Norseman."

"I think I would back these old chiefs of the Cataract to handle a dahabieh with Othere himself, the old sea captain, who probably never ran up the Nile so far," said Allerton. "I have watched an Indian send his birch-bark canoe down the Sault Ste. Marie rapid, and with that exception never witnessed a finer exhibition of skill and coolness. I think we are through the worst of it now. We are passing that gem of an island, Shehayl, and nearing the foot of the second rapid."

"This old *Fatima* of ours is a stunning seaboat, or whatever you call it, in a river," said Mr. Baldhill. How she flung the foam from her bow going through those black rocks! I thought, like Isabel, we were done for just before that old chap did the shunting business. Well done, pilot! well done Reis! that's your sort. Now your troubles are over for a bit. Well done, old man! You deserve a pipe, and the best Turkish tobacco too." These exclamations were called forth by the sudden subsidence of motion.

They had swept into a quiet bay. The waters were at rest. What had become of the fierce turmoil of the cataract? All was peace, rest, tranquil enjoyment.

"Here we leave our boat," said Allerton; "we have done enough for one day. It is scarcely two miles to Philæ. We can go overland and camp there for the night, if we like the idea. Fortunately, it is nearly full moon."

"Philæ by moonlight!" said Isabel; "of course we will. I would not miss it if we had to live upon bread and water for a month. Only two miles off. Let us start at once."

More prudent council prevailed. It was judged expedient to partake of a solid and satisfying lunch; then to send forward by Ibrahim and his contingent all things necessary for a secure and decorous encampment. After which the voyagers addressed themselves to the momentous pilgrimage.

They had passed through such contrasts of scenery, where dead cities and living landscapes were so wondrously intermingled, that all faculty of wonder and admiration had well nigh been exhausted. But when they approached the river port of Berber and came suddenly, as if by a magic gateway in the mountain, upon Philæ, every tongue was hushed, every spirit filled with a new-born sense of sublimity. Lovelier than poet's dream, grand beyond the imagination of the world-worn traveller amid the triumphs of architecture, sweeter in its loveliness than Arcadia, unearthly as the kingdom of the Queen of the Faerye—all images of grandeur and beauty paled before this actual presentment of Philæ.

Years have rolled on. The tide of life has ebbed and flowed since first they saw those high-piled masses of darksome rocks, of weird shape, and strange contour, the silvery sands, the deep-hued verdure, the purple flowers, the nodding palm plumes, yet till life's current fails and the frosts of age have chilled the pulses of the heart, ne'er can that memory fail. Almost painful was the feeling of surprised rapture which possessed every gazer as through craggy rock and waving foliage the silvern surface of the lake appeared. Lo! in the centre of the charmed water arises the sacred island—an emerald carven to the river's edge—amid the solemn shadows of the temple city.

Like frowning giants, rugged and darksome mountains encircle the valley. Yet all is peaceful beneath their desolate summits, their torn and rifted cliffs. Fairy minarets and terraces show themselves through the close-woven foliage of the banks. In weird and awful beauty stands the city of the dead; a cluster of enchanted palaces awaiting but the horn of the predestined prince—the long-expected deliverer.

"O Fate, thou art too kind!" said Isabel with a

kind of shriek of delight as the magical scene burst upon her vision. "I am quite willing to die, if only I have time to say my prayers. I feel like Mahomet at Damascus; there cannot be two heavens; we had better leave this one and wait for the other."

"We can pardon enthusiasm here," said Marguerite; "the Genius of the place pleads for it. Could one have imagined that the world contained such a spot! How much the over-cautious people lose who stay at home!"

"It is a beautiful place," said Mrs. Baldhill; "there's no doubt about that; but I could no more live here than I could fly. I should fancy some of those old priests would come at night and carry me off into a tomb. The air must be full of ghosts and spirits, if there are such things. I see that good Ibrahim has got the tents pitched down by the shore and a fire lighted. I should like a cup of tea, I must say. After you've been and admired anything until you can't do it any more, there's nothing like a good cup of tea."

Marie made a few exclamations, such as "*Ah, ciel*" and "*Grace à Dieu*," at first, but gradually appeared to lean to the more material view of the subject taken by Mrs. Baldhill. Isabel could hardly be removed except by force; but eventually the little party found themselves seated on their carpets, sipping the ever-comforting beverage and gazing tranquilly at the towers and domes of the mystic island, as if (this was Mrs. Baldhill's interpolation) they had been having a picnic at Rose Bay or Middle Harbour.

But when, after the lingering eve had fled, the moon arose with sudden illumination of the shadowy island, the enchanted groves, the majestic ruins, Isabel sprang to her feet, declaring that she saw white-robed forms and that it must be the feast of Hathor. She insisted upon a ramble along the river shore. Her persistence ended as usual in the acquiescence of her father, who, with Mrs. Mortimer and Allerton, felt compelled to accompany her in the quest for ghostly processions and revived festivals.

"Surely we are not in the same world as Australia and poor old Merradoolah," she said to her indulgent

parent. "I feel as if I had been dead and come to life again in this delicious land of wonders and miracles. We must come back again some day, like Mr. Allerton —won't we, dad?"

"Certainly, pussy! if the seasons keep good out there."

"What a night of splendour and sorcery. What a divine fragment of human life," said Allerton, musingly. "No wonder the priests of the most ancient of religions regarded this wondrous retreat as sacred! They were wise in their generation. Surrounded by such supernal influences, surely the brain must be exalted, the heart emotionalised above man's ordinary standard! Do you not believe with me?" he asked suddenly turning to Marguerite. "You have a soul that soars above conventional bounds."

"Such things may be," replied she, gently, as she marked his changed expression and ardent regard; "but a deeper wisdom distrusts the guidance of the feelings. In its undisturbed moods reason compares and decides. The principle which shapes our course is ever the product of tranquil thought. All moral intoxicants produce but temporary brilliancy—to end in depression and despair."

"And are you one of those calm-natured, I will not say cold-blooded, organisms that on all occasions subordinate the spirit light, the ethereal splendour of the imagination, to the fancied demands of duty or circumstance? Were we not created to enjoy, to seek happiness with kindred spirits, not to grovel aimlessly, hopelessly, amid the enslaved herd of society?"

"I am by no means calm-natured," answered Marguerite; "but I distrust all steps that are not on the firm ground of experience and authority. The stronger the natural disposition to speculative freedom, the greater the necessity for control."

"You are speaking in your character of *gouvernante*," he replied, with a tone of disappointment. "Can you not give me credit for divining that you were neither born nor intended for such a position? Isabel is a good child and has a fine nature; but she little

knows the captive princess who honours her by attendance."

A saddened smile passed over Marguerite's face as she answered—"If you have divined any portion of my secret, of facts which I have reason not to wish known, you will, I feel certain, base upon that knowledge even greater consideration for me. But it is idle to talk of sentiments in which neither you nor I can ever share."

"Are you so certain?" replied he, fixing his earnest gaze upon her. And in the moon's rays his eyes appeared to burn and scintillate like the stars in the blue heaven above. "Fate may be stronger than either of us."

"That is a phrase," replied she, raising her head with an answering gleam of not less power, "only for the convenience of weak souls who dare not suffer, much less die for their faith. Destiny breaks the martyrs of life on the wheel of misfortune; it can neither force recantation nor compel dishonour."

As she uttered this last sentence Marguerite stood with head erect and that poise of figure which seemed to promise a gesture of defiance. Allerton thought her form and mien alike queenly, and could have pictured some royal captive defying the grim cruelty of the priests of Isis. Then her head was bowed, her face assumed an expression of sadly reminiscent feeling, as she exclaimed in a changed voice, "We have been vainly discussing the abstract—let us regain the practical by returning."

When they returned Marie was slumbering at the side of Mrs. Baldhill, who was still awake and alive to the influences of the scene. "I didn't feel up to walking half the night after the day we've had," said that matron; "but it will be a long time before we have another time like this, and we may as well make the best of it. I've been reading in my Bible, Isabel, and there is no doubt in my mind that this is one of the places that the prophet Isaiah speaks of: 'They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing.'"

Here the tired girl sat down at her mother's feet,

resting her head, child-like upon her lap as she proceeded to read the verses of doom, which in her undoubting belief referred to the picturesque desolation by which they were surrounded.

"'And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.'

"'The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow, the screech owl shall also rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.'"

As the last words of the reader fell upon the ears of the listeners an immense dark-winged bird flitted noiselessly across the moonlit sky and perched upon a sculptured propylon which stood shadowless in the crystal clearness of the night. In the unbroken stillness of the hour there seemed something supernatural in the literal fulfilment of these images of desolation.

Isabel shuddered. "I hope that dreadful bird is not one of ill omen. He sits there like Edgar Poe's raven. I wonder upon which of us the fate will fall?"

"Not upon you, dearest child," said Marguerite, taking the girl's delicate hand in hers caressingly; "but you have overtired yourself. We must not have any more moonlight rambles," and with a silent greeting and somewhat subdued spirits the wearied wayfarers sought their couches.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was decided to hand over the ascent of the Second Cataract to the Reis and Ibrahim conjointly, so as to devote the day to the exploration of the Sacred Island. At an early hour another potentate appeared to claim consideration and backsheesh, announcing himself as the King of Philæ.

The title seemed to have been conferred upon the handsome, eager-eyed young fellow who bore it by his

village comrades, much for the same reason and in the same manner as the Queen of the May is elected in rural England. Alif Ben Helim piloted the travellers across to the island in a somewhat primitive barge, but which proved safe and effective.

Hardly had their landing been completed when a bevy of dusky heads appeared in the blue water, making directly for the island. "Oh, look, look!" said Isabel; "are these more kings? Ask him what they are, Mr. Allerton."

The question was soon solved, as the Nubian maidens, for such they were, floated on to the beach, and raising themselves gracefully, walked with a perfectly unembarrassed air towards the party. One or two of them untwisted the veils which they had worn turban-fashion, during their swim, and rearranged them from the head over the shoulders. The rest of the party, wholly unclothed save by the girdle which all the women of Nubia wear, wrung the water from their ebon tresses, and took their places in society, apparently as unconscious of impropriety as if just emerged from the Garden of Eden. They offered beads, coins, and simple curios for sale; but were disappointed to find that the strangers preferred to hurry on and commence the investigation of the Great Temple.

Alif led the way to a dark and narrow staircase, which took them to an enormous portal covered with gigantic hieroglyphs. This opened into a vast and splendid court of the Great Temple, with a noble columnar façade. The patterns of the capitals were different, but the delicate tracery of the work was consummate.

"Think of the effect," said Allerton, "when all the fresh colours of these paintings, brilliant and diversified as they were, were to be seen upon each slightest carving."

"How it must have contrasted with the gloom of this next court!" said Marguerite. "The walls here are of immense height, and get quite narrow towards the sky. What could have been the intention? Here we have gigantic sculptures, difficult, almost impossible, to trace."

"Look at this row of Sphinxes!" said Isabel, who had been peering about, silent and awe-stricken, amid these dread relics of the past; "how solemn and dreadful they look. What is the meaning of Sphinx? What language is it? Has it any meaning?"

"The word is Greek. It means 'the strangler,'" said Allerton. "Not a pleasing attribute, either of the female or the lioness with which it seems incorporated."

"I was sure it was something dreadful," said Isabel, shrinkingly. "There is a malignant expression in the creatures' faces. I am certain there is some weird legend attached to them."

"Now that the sun comes in here," said Maguerite, "you can see what the carving of the capitals is intended to represent. It must be the plant-life of the land. There are palms, lotus leaves, acacia fronds, and flowers."

"That's exactly what it is. We were told so. But we should not have had cleverness enough to find it out for ourselves."

"What is that winged globe—a bright blue?" asked Isabel. "How beautiful the colouring is."

"That is the emblem of the Supreme Divinity," answered Allerton. "Those gigantic columns which support it have been coloured in the same way. How wonderfully bright they are still!"

"I had no idea so much was well-preserved," said Isabel. "I thought we should see nothing but mouldy ruins. These palaces might have been built yesterday. How hard it seems that there is nothing like them in the world now, with people living in them!"

"Would you like to go up by a secret staircase in the wall?" asked Allerton. "I know one here. I dare say the priests used them either to appear suddenly to their worshippers or to disappear."

"Perhaps the priests were very good men," said Isabel. "Just as good as their people deserved. But does the secret staircase lead anywhere?"

"Only to a small shrine in the roof," he said. "It was long unknown, but is now called the 'Resurrection Chamber,' because the sculptures on the walls represent the death and return to life of Osiris."

"Oh, certainly, let us all come."

"It is one of the most interesting bits of exploration in the whole island," said Allerton. "You had better let me go first. There are seven steps, and you observe here, at the side, a smooth place scooped out as if for a coffin."

They followed their leader and passed into the Chamber of the Dead—dead in the world's historic dawn. A spear of sunshine pierces through a loophole, lighting up the storied walls.

"Oh! how wonderful; how curiously true to nature!" murmured Isabel. "You can see the women weeping around a bier. I suppose it is that of Osiris. Who was it killed him? I forget. But he has been dead so long, it can't matter. Those winged figures at the head and feet are like Cherubims. What is the bird that hovers over the body?"

"That symbolises the soul," said Allerton; "so Mr. Hopley, who was here at the time, told us. He wrote *Under Egyptian Palms*, you remember. The body gradually regains life and motion; and that last picture on the farthest wall shows you Osiris in all his glory restored to life and supreme dominion."

. . . . . .

The day was done. The broad crimson streamers in the West had paled, the stars were out, before the pilgrims returned to their tents. Delicious coffee and an inviting repast awaited them. Up to the closing hour their time had been filled with wonders and objects of interest, ever calling for fresh admiration.

They wandered through darkened tombs to lofty terraces, from haunted chambers to regal courts, where the monarch and all his nobles might have feasted. Walls of a height that was wearisome to the eye, covered with gigantic hieroglyphs and figures of gods and warriors, self-supported between earth and sky. Groves of columns with delicately luxuriant capitals, the enamel brilliant and abounding as of yesterday; each pillar and wall covered with heiroglyphics as with a petrified tapestry.

"Oh! what a celestial view!" cried Isabel, as they

stood on the terrace near the river, which overlooked the assemblage of temples, and gazed around. The sun was sinking, gold-barred and glowing, amid the gorgeous cloud pageant, which appeared to be lowered with him into subterranean depths. Beneath them lay the green, flower-decked island strewn with marble wrought into every beautiful form of ancient art. Piles of prostrate pillars, groves of waving palms, the white shafts of shrines; and all around the island flowed the clear bright river. Opposite, on the further shore, lay the old temple of Osiris, sometimes called "Pharaoh's Bed."

"I could live here for years," said Isabel, sighing. "How nice it would be to turn oneself into a kind of Lady Hester Stanhope. I don't think it would be hard to rule over these people. They appear very simple. Lady Duff Gordon says they are all, particularly the Arabs, the soul of honour, and have a sensitive conscience about morality and honesty quite unknown among our people."

"I believe that to be the case," said Allerton, with a certain grim emphasis; "but not in the sense you mean. It is my belief and opinion that some of these high-souled Arabs calculated most accurately the length of her ladyship's foot, shaping their manners and conversation accordingly."

"Do you mean that they wilfully deceived her?" asked Isabel impetuously.

"Very possibly. Both these ladies were rich—at least comparatively so—romantic and imaginative. They had no prosaic male relative with them to correct misconception. My opinion of the ordinary Eastern person would have been expressed, if required, in the terms I once heard used in answer to a similar inquiry—'he would deceive Father Peter, let alone you.'"

"It is very depressing to have to take a low view of human nature," said Isabel. "Why is not all the world high-souled and self-sacrificing? Many people only appear so, I suppose. Adieu Philæ! How the shadows are deepening. We may say 'by Him, who sleeps at Philæ,' if we want to be impressive when we get back, and now I think I shall go to my tea, as I

once heard a red Indian chief (a real one) in a circus remark. I never expected to hear the countrymen of Chingachgook and Uncas express himself so. Life is a list of lost illusions."

They descended, and found Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill, who had been less romantically employed—in fact superintending the preparation of toast. "Oh! here you all are," said Mrs. Baldhill. "I have such a lovely tea ready for you. We were beginning to think you had lost yourselves, and would have to sleep among the mummies."

. . . . . .

Next morning an important and mysterious discussion, inasmuch as the ladies were excluded from it, took place on the shore of the Sacred Island. From time to time, it appeared that Ibrahim, through channels of communication open to him alone, had received intelligence that war and rebellion were gaining strength rather than showing signs of subsidence. What might be the end he could not say. If Arabi Bey were vanquished, which he held to be a certainty, this new Pretender of the Desert was a more serious and dangerous antagonist.

"The Mahdi" would gather strength, doubtless; if defeated, he would retire to the desert solitudes. His array of wild horsemen might temporarily "split and squander," but could easily reunite at a given point. He was, so the Bedaween thought, a prophet, commissioned by Allah to drive the infidel from the land—he might even raise the green flag, and proclaim a holy war, when every Moslem in India and Turkey, as well as Arabia and Egypt, would be bound to fly to his standard.

"All this is by no means reassuring, Baldhill," said Bruce Allerton. "We do not know precisely whether this outbreak at Alexandria and Cairo may affect matters down the river, while this scoundrelly prophet El Mahdi, as he calls himself, may make the roads unsafe of access to the Red Sea ports."

"There's no two ways about it," said Mr. Baldhill; "I don't like the look of things at all. If I had had half a notion they were going to turn out like this I'd have

left Egypt for another season. However, we must look the thing in the face, and not get flurried about chances. Has anything more been heard from Cairo?"

"Ibrahim says that some friends of his—Arab merchants from the Nejed—are on their way back from Cairo. They are highly respectable people from Ri'ad—not infidel thieves, as he calls these Egyptian Bedaween. They will, of course, have the latest news. We can gather from them whether it is worth while to go up the river to Korosko, or if we ought to make the quickest time we can manage to gain a Red Sea port. Once there, even if we have to take a native vessel, we can get over to Suez."

"I wish to heaven we were safe there now," said Mr. Baldhill. "I don't mind a bit of a brush, but we have women with us, and that is bad for fighting or even running away. We can't do better than wait till these fellows come, and find out just where we stand before we make a fresh start."

This being decided, the minds of both men were apparently at rest. Not that it was so in reality. But they belonged to the class of organisers who devote themselves with energy, untiring and ceaseless, to any line of action once laid down, but rarely repine at the inevitable.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE situation was becoming dramatic. Allerton had sufficient knowledge of Eastern life to conjecture what would be the fate of helpless women in the hands of an undisciplined soldiery, actuated by a fanatical hatred of infidels. If they took the ordinary route down the Nile, they might be met by bands of the rebel army. If they took the track across the desert to Kosseir and Suakim, on the Red Sea, what guarantee had they that the first cloud of dust might not resolve itself into a troop of Bedaween? It was a difficult problem!

Fortunately for himself and Mr. Baldhill, upon whom

the burden and responsibility of the undertaking fell, the merchants of the Nejed, to whom Ibrahim had so often referred, arrived on the next day. The suspense was therefore terminable. Without delay, save for the inevitable preliminaries of Eastern etiquette, they arranged for an interview. The men whom they desired so ardently to see were encamped in a village near the tomb of Pharaoh.

The dress of these personages was different from that to which the travellers had of late been accustomed. Each had spotlessly clean linen garments and a magnificent robe of scarlet cloth.

Hoseyn-el-Bassora and Kasseem-Ben-Alee were decidedly responsible-looking men. They had come from a province of the Nejed which lies north of Djebel Shomer to Cairo. They had a respectable following with them. But what their exact business was, or why they had come so far up the Nile, instead of going back by Ma'an, could not be fathomed. Ibrahim, indeed, threw out dark hints about a large contract in slaves, which, he said, could not be carried out now, for obvious reasons. Whatever their errand was, they kept a discreet silence. And Bruce Allerton was too well versed in Eastern manners to be openly curious about a matter as to which no information was volunteered.

He was on the point of offering the usual compliment of tobacco and a chibouk to the two grave men who sat before the door of a large tent on a striped Persian carpet, when he saw something in Ibrahim's face which prevented him. Then he recollected that the stricter Wah-hahbees of Northern Arabia, to a district of which the men before them belonged, do not smoke, and that the use of the "shameful," as they unkindly designate the herb nicotian, is one of the sins punished by the "unco' guid" of that "denomination" with exemplary severity.

"Speak to them, Ibrahim," said Allerton; "tell them we are English Wah-hahbees, anxious to know how goes the war; also to discover whether El Mahdi's force may be expected here."

Thus adjured, one of the Howadjis of Ri'ad lifted up his sombre countenance, and oracularly spake :—

"Allah is great. The soldiers of the Inglesi have fought with the army of Arabi Bey. May his face be blackened. A great battle has been fought at Tel-el-Kebir."

"And Arabi is a prisoner or a fugitive?" said Allerton.

"How does the Inglesi Pasha know that?" said Kasseem-Ben-Alee, looking doubtfully at Ibrahim. "There are no poles that carry the lightning on wires in Upper Egypt. Can the Giaours send their news by a bird?"

"It is not so. Let Allah have the glory," said Ibrahim. "This Bey of the Inglesi only believes that his countrymen must have won the battle because they are brave, and because they have guns, of which the bullets fly like hail in the mountains when you turn a handle."

"The Inglesi Bahadoor is right," said the elder merchant, solemnly. "The great general of the infidels surprised Arabi's camp in the night. His soldiers had bare legs; they ran, they bounded—their war-cry, their battle music, were alike terrible. Arabi's soldiers could not withstand it—they became as dead men. His army is scattered, his power is gone. He himself is a prisoner among the soldiers of the Inglesi."

"Well done, Sir Garnet!" said Allerton. "Of course it could be no one else. He has been lucky, as usual. Ask them, Ibrahim, if crimes were committed or plunder took place in Alexandria?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" translated Ibrahim; "terrible things were done by sons of Shaitan, both in Alexandria and Cairo. Houses were burned, the Inglesi were insulted. There were robberies and violence. Many of the Inglesi went on board ships at Alexandria. But all is at an end."

"I trust so," said Allerton, with a flushed brow; "it should never have been allowed to commence. Was justice done upon these robbers and murderers?"

"The sword of justice has been raised. Fear has taken possession of all evil-doers; some are in prison,

some have been hanged like dogs. All is now peaceful as a mosque."

"And of El Mahdi? How is it with him?" continued Allerton. "How do your friends regard him?"

"He will prosper if Allah be with him. If he goes to war in his own strength he will fall like a decayed tree, never to rise. He is in the hands of Allah. Who can tell?"

"Ask them if the Sheiks of the Nejed will join him. If he can be sure of support from the great Wah-hahbee Sultan?"

"Will the children of Feysul and Abdallah throw in their lot with a Shi-ayee and a blasphemer?" asked Hoseyn-el-Bassora, with deep disdain. "They are Moslem, ah as well as he. But the lion of the desert will sooner pick bones with the jackal than the Sultans of Oman and Shomer join with a rabble of Syrian horse-thieves and Soudan slave-dealers."

"It is well," Allerton said, pleased at having elicited this apparently genuine outburst. "If El Mahdi depends wholly upon the vagrant tribes on the border of the Soudan, his career will soon come to an end."

"You never know what those cunning Wah-hahbees mean," said Ibrahim, when the merchants had retired to their tent; "and, from what I hear, El Mahdi has some good fighting men with him. I believe not in Arabs who are too pious to smoke, but don't mind buying slaves. I should not wonder if these Howadjis, as they call themselves, are come to spy out how matters are going on in the Soudan, so that they may be able to tell their master, who is the craftiest and most blood-thirsty tyrant in all Arabia, whether it is safe for him to join forces."

"Then all the indignation about El Mahdi is pretended, you think?"

"I more than think it. I know the Arabs. I am half a one myself, and a good—that is, fairly good—Mussulman. But I have eaten the salt of you Inglesi, and dwelt among your people. I know, therefore, that there is more truth and honesty in a hundred of your countrymen than in all the Arabs from Cairo to the sea

of Oman. All the same, I think we shall be able to return safely, whatever may happen."

The effect of this momentous conversation was proportionate to its importance. Mr. Baldhill was seriously moved and disposed to agree with one Hassan, the camel-driver, his lament—

> "Sad was the hour and luckless was the day
> When first from Shiraz walls I bent my way."

Why did he quit the safe tendance and undeniable comfort of the P. and O.? A restless desire for knowledge and adventure, a weak compliance with a child's will, had led to an unnecessary exploration of "this infernal Never Never country," as Mr. Baldhill characterised both Lower and Upper Egypt in his wrath, and now bade fair to be the destruction of them. Why can't people let well alone? and so on.

After this burst of perhaps natural self-reproach, his eminently cool, constitutional sagacity commenced to assert itself. He resolved to acquaint Mrs. Baldhill with the whole of the circumstances of the case, and to take her opinion of the matter. "I've never kept anything from her before," he said. "It doesn't seem natural like, and I'm too old to begin now. We're all in the same boat, and two heads is a long way better than one."

Allerton was averse to placing the intelligence in the hands of the ladies of the party, but finally concluded that it could make no great difference.

The effect of the news upon them was striking and characteristic. Marie screamed and committed herself to the mercy of "*le bon Dieu*" with more fervour and devotional energy than she had previously exhibited. Mrs. Baldhill looked grave and thoughtful, but forbore much comment. Marguerite seemed to rise to the occasion. Its gravity aroused the natural daring which was habitual with her in matters of emergency, while Isabel seemed actually to exult in the probability of danger and the certainty of a more adventurous termination to their Nile voyage than they could have anticipated

"It's perfectly splendid!" she exclaimed. "I declare I wouldn't have missed it for anything. A regular war, with soldiers and fighting! Perhaps we may see some of them. We shall have a battle of the Nile after all—a real one, and no mistake."

"I hope it may not be too real, pussy," said Mr. Baldhill. "Your old dad would give his best flock of sheep—yes, the stud flock, with all them Broombee ewes in it—to get his own pet lamb safe back at Merradoolah. However, it mayn't be so bad after all. I expect Sir Garnet's knocked saucepans out of these Arabi bays, and grays too, by this time. I don't expect they'll want another licking."

"Poor people! they're only fighting for their own country, after all," said the democratic damsel of the South. "How would you like to be ruled over by foreigners from generation to generation yourself, dad, if it came to that?"

"You are hardly stating the case fairly, Miss Isabel," said Allerton. "In the first place, the Turks have been the natural rulers—by conquest—of Egypt since the days of the Caliph Omar and his general Amrou. Then Mehemet Ali manages to set up a kingdom of Egypt for himself, and to rule independently of his suzerain, the Sultan. In both these governments the native Egyptians of the cities and the fellaheen of the country have been ground down, taxed, and starved; in every way cruelly used and oppressed as far as could be done under a show of government without taking their lives. Mehemet Ali and Ibrahim, his son, did not stop at that, for they took their lives also unreservedly, and in considerable numbers, too, whenever it so pleased them."

"Why did they not rebel?"

"Because they were afraid to rebel against a government that punished revolt with remorseless cruelty. But they were not afraid of us, because the English Government is always just and merciful in dealing with weaker races. We insisted on their being treated fairly; we established courts for their protection. The joint control of the French and English Governments secured them the sole measure of justice which they had ever seen or heard of, for centuries at least.

With the characteristic ingratitude of the lower orders of humanity, they suspected us of weakness, and rebelled accordingly."

"I didn't know all that," said Isabel, with a certain air of compunction. "It really looks as if some sorts of people were incapable of appreciating a merciful rule."

"It would appear so," answered Allerton drily.

"My opinion is that they want putting down and keeping down," said Mr. Baldhill, who was commencing to exhibit signs of impatience at the purely abstract nature of the discussion. "You might as well try oilcake on a mallee scrubber as the real, straightforward English law on these blackguard mongrel in-and-out-bred Egyptians. They don't know truth or honesty when they see it, and don't want to; a big stick is the only law they understand. But between them and these bushranging ruffians of Arabs there's enough of them to eat us without salt. Now the real question is, which road are we to take?"

"Suppose we go straight back?" said Mrs. Baldhill, who now took her place in the council of war, quietly and unostentatiously, in a way which showed that she was devoid of timidity, and that it was not the first time she had assisted in important debates.

"I am afraid that the river, northwards, is our least safe highway of all under present circumstances," said Allerton. "These men have told Ibrahim that Lower Egypt, especially in the vicinity of the river, is full of the disbanded soldiers of Arabi Bey, of refugees from the cities, and, indeed, the most lawless portion of the community. At the best of times there is some danger of river pirates, but now the risk would be indefinitely increased."

"How about this track across to the Red Sea?" said Mr. Baldhill. "Didn't you say it was only seventy miles from Keneh to Kosseir? We could do that at a push in two days easy enough. Once in a vessel we should be safe from these land thieves, at any rate."

"I had a talk with Ibrahim about that yesterday," said Allerton; "and he took a long time to palaver the matter thoroughly with Messrs. Hoseyn and Kasseem.

He happens to be a Soonnee—as they are—and that being the case, he has the benefit of a sort of free-masonry binding them to tell him the truth on all subjects not immediately connected with their own interests."

"And what did they say?"

"Well, a good deal; but the substance of it was that it was rumoured that several of the great Arab tribes were on the march—the Shomer, at any rate—and that the route would be crossed at several points by their main forces, or by outlying scout parties, which would be worse. They spoke significantly, and urged the Inglesi Milord not to risk that part of the desert for two or three months yet."

"Did they go the length of advising a route?" asked Marguerite, who had listened intently.

"Well, yes; partly. They themselves are going up the river as far as Korosko, and thence across to Khartoum. What their business was, they did not reveal. They are aware that General Gordon is there. They believe that he would have been more prudent to have left with the troops, but they hold him to be under the direct protection of the Almighty."

"For what reason?"

"Well, everybody knows, and they all seem to be aware, that Gordon is a peculiarly religious man. In this sense he believes that God has given him certain work to do upon the earth among these people. Therefore, such is his duty. He carries his life in his hand, being fixed in the opinion that all men should cheerfully lay down their lives when duty demands the sacrifice. Arabs and Egyptians alike know this; consequently they have a superstitious dread of withstanding him."

"Are these men emissaries of Zebehr Pasha, do you think?"

"I can't imagine it. He himself is the greatest scoundrel in the Soudan or anywhere between Wadi Halfa and the Sennaar. A wide word among negro chiefs who sell slaves by the village at a time; among Arab slave-dealers who will buy any quantity of the article from a family to a province, and kill half to raise the price of the rest. He is a murderer and a robber,

or would be so designated officially were not his operations conducted generally on a large scale. Withal, he has undoubted military capacity, and, once enlisted on the right side, sufficient courage and organising power to hold down the Soudan as no other man in Egypt or Nubia could be relied upon to do."

"What is likely to happen is hard to predict," said Allerton, thoughtfully. "If this movement of El Mahdi progresses, and it may gather force as it advances, serious mischief may ensue. The great tribes of Shomer and the Hedjaz, which distrust the Sultan, and hate the son of Feysul, and the Wahabees generally—as they have good reason to do—may join him, when it will take sharp fighting before they are put down."

"We seem to be regular surrounded," said Mr. Baldhill. "It looks as if we could neither go forward nor backwards. What do you propose to do?"

"I don't think anything better can be done than to follow our present course up the river as far as Korosko. Thence the trail goes south across the desert to Shendy and Sennaar; it cuts the Nile again at Abou Hamed. The caravans to and from the south start from Korosko. We shall have a good chance of hearing all the news, and can shape our course more accurately than here. If things are quiet we can go as far as Wadi Halfa, when, taking Thebes as we return, we shall have seen everything about Egypt that is worth seeing."

"I wish I'd never seen it at all, as far as that goes," said Mr. Baldhill. "What do you say, old woman?"

"I think Mr. Allerton is about right," said his wife. "It's better to go on than to keep running back, and fluttering about like a hen in a garden. I daresay we shall find a chance of a back track, or some 'cut' as soon as we know which way to head without making straight into the lion's mouth."

So much being settled, it but remained to reload and get the *Fatima* under way again. Every one worked with a will, and with the evening breeze the undaunted voyagers were again standing out for the further bank of the river, in full route for Wadi Halfa.

"So much for Egypt; we are now in Nubia, it seems," said Isabel, as the party were seated upon their

cushions watching the high piled masses of syenite which overhung the river banks where they narrowed.

"I must say I like these people better than the Egyptians. Every man carries a spear, a club, or a shield of hippopotamus hide. It certainly gives them a more manly and courageous appearance. What do they call themselves?"

"There are several distinct tribes. The Ababde, the Moggrebyn, and the Bishareen; these last are more Arabs than Nubians. The Egyptians called them Berberi, possibly a corruption of the term Barbari, which the Romans applied rather indiscriminately to all other nations."

"Is there anything still more wonderful to see higher up the river?" asked Marguerite. "I must confess to being a trifle weary with cataracts and temples, besides the pedestrianism we have been performing lately."

"There are the great rock temples of Ipsamboul," said Allerton, "perhaps the most astonishing record of man's skill and energy which even this wondrous river has to show. With that, and Thebes, the Sphinx avenues of Luxor and Karnak, I think we may close our wanderings, if we are fated to find a clear road out of this disturbed, ill-fated land."

"Why, you're not going to give in?" said Isabel, with an air of saucy scorn. "I shall have to pose as Zenobia, or some of those people, and take the lead of the expedition when we get to Korosko. I should like to go on an embassy to King John of Abyssinia—he's a Christian, you know—persuade him to bring down his invincible troops, crush the Mahdi, liberate Gordon, and then I should be the most celebrated young woman in the world—for a bit. What splendid romances seem possible when you come to this land of wonders! Now, nothing of that kind would have been possible at Merradoolah."

"And a very good thing too," said Mrs. Baldhill. "Once we get back to the Warra Warra again you won't catch me travelling for a year or two. It seems to me that people don't know when they're well off sometimes in Australia. There we are with a splendid climate (except in the middle of summer), soil that will

grow anything (when it rains), thousands and thousands of miles of grass (in a good season), beef and mutton as cheap as oatmeal (except when the butchers combine to raise the price), and *the* finest harbour in the world—and yet people are not contented! We deserve to have something dreadful happen to us for our unthankfulness, I really do believe."

"Well done, mother!" laughed Isabel, apparently by no means converted by this list of her country's glories. "You're a regular good patriotic 'cornstalk,' though your exceptions are pretty level with your list of advantages. I don't say anything against poor dear old Botany Bay, as our English friends call it. It's a first-rate bread-and-butter country, I'll admit; and if a woman is to find all earthly happiness in three meals a day, with a good house over her head, a silk dress, and good horses to ride and drive, one need never leave it. But that isn't the whole of life."

"More's the pity," rejoined the good dame, as she surveyed the weird scenery, which, with a low moon and a doubtful light, showed far from a domestic style of landscape. "Before you children began to grow up, your father and I were satisfied with a steady station life and one trip to Sydney a year. But now everybody has grown so terribly rich that there's nothing but rushing backward and forward to England, and America—and Africa, isn't this?—all round the world. It may suit you young folks, but it don't agree with me. So when we see Double Bay again—if ever we do see it—I give you fair warning, Isabella—you'll have to make the best of Sydney until you're married and settled."

"When that stupendous event takes place," answered Isabel, "and I trust that it will not come to pass until 'remote ages,' if ever, some unfortunate Benedict will discover that, like

> "'The young man of Ballinacrasy,
> He has married a wife to make him unasy.'

I don't intend to 'settle down,' as you call it, for the next twenty years or so. Then I shall be only thirty-six—quite young and beautiful still. Sha'n't I, Mrs.

Mortimer? However, we won't anticipate evil. Wait till we're safe back at dear old Merradoolah, and I'll be a good girl for ever so long."

CHAPTER XXIX

THUS they glided along the murmuring tide day and night. A lotus-eating existence was theirs—a dream-like, unreal succession of silent joys, as each realised to the full the voluptuous enjoyment. In the sultry time of the day the silence was intense—all were perforce unable to read, converse, or even think connectedly—nothing was possible but to dream away the lingering hours.

But the night—the glorious season of rest and stillness which every eastern bard has celebrated in song—was wont to repay the travellers for the *ennui* and endurance of the day. The stars shone with supernal brilliancy unknown in northern climes; large, lustrous, quivering, they gleamed and shimmered in the dark blue heavens like "patines of pure gold"; lines of gem-strewed light seemed showered upon the luminous waters of the great river, on whose bosom they floated so noiselessly and swift. Ever and anon the solemn outline of a rock-hewn temple arose out of the "lone be-legended waste."

> "Voiceless, but of empire telling,
> And the lore of ages dim."

The whole party seemed to feel as if they were under the influence of a spell, and were gliding through this mysterious desert, by temple and tower and town, in obedience to the summons of an enchanter.

"We are living the life of the *Arabian Nights*," said Isabel, as she awoke from a day-dream. "If we go far enough we shall meet the Caliph Haroun El Raschid face to face, with the Grand Vizier, the Barmecide, and all the

rest of them. What a pity that nearly all the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Romance should have died out! We must try and discover some, though, before we return to the land of Reality."

"I am not sure that we may not meet too many of the dwellers in that land you so much regret before our travels conclude," said Allerton. "I trust they may prove satisfactory acquaintances."

"They will be better than the dead-and-alive dawdlers of every-day life," said the impetuous Isabel. "I don't object to a spice, or indeed a good strong flavour, of danger. I do so thirst for adventure. If I had been a man in the Middle Ages I should have been a free companion, or something of that sort, I know I should."

"You seem bent on emulating the goddess Diana," said Allerton, "who, we have it on Mr. Swiveller's authority, 'calls aloud for the chase.' As I said before, I hope all will end well, in case we have anything more than ordinary Nile voyaging to deal with."

"Now you are laughing at me," said the girl, pouting. "If any real danger comes, you will see whether I am in earnest or not."

Allerton smiled at this petulance of the capricious spoiled beauty. He made a jesting apology as he turned away; but in reality he was troubled in mind as to the safety of the party. If this insurrection spread, as it showed every appearance of doing, in addition to all Upper Egypt becoming unsafe, the ordinary desert routes would be hostile country, full of marauders as merciless as swift-footed; bands difficult to elude, and impossible to escape from by flight. Whichever way he considered the situation the outlook was gloomy.

Nothing appeared, however, to be more safe for the present than to continue their voyage with as little deviation from the original programme as possible, trusting to the doctrine of chance for their final extrication.

So fared they on, with little change of scene or occupation, till, passing Korosko and Dirv, they approached Wadi Halfa, about five miles south of the Second Cataract, nine days after their departure from

Philæ. It was decided not to explore the wonderful rock-palaces of Ipsamboul, on the northern side of Wadi Halfa. Mr. Baldhill contended that they had seen rocks, temples, pyramids, and statues in sufficient quantity to last reasonable persons for the term of their natural lives.

. . . . . .

In accordance with intelligence which Ibrahim had received from a co-religionist, it was decided to drop down the river as far as Dirv, the chief town in Nubia. Mrs. Baldhill had been much excited by the sight of a rock-temple called Gebel Adha, which had been used in later times as a Christian Church. She had seen the images of our Saviour and the Virgin blazoned in glowing colours on the walls and roofs, surrounded by trophies of the idols whose worship they had swept away.

She wondered much where the heathen could be found for these temples, or the Christians for that church. Surely not in the interminable desert wastes which in our time encompass them! As they glided down the river the brilliant light of the moon enabled her to sit on deck and read the Prophecies—to her great comfort and satisfaction.

Now that there was a probability of more regular river-journeying, the crew again became objects of special interest. Allerton and Mr. Baldhill mingled with them, and renewed the sort of every-day acquaintance which they had taken care to maintain in the early part of the voyage.

"Did you ever see any man fill out and furnish like that young fellow Omar, or whatever they call him, that we bought at the slave-yard by the river coming up?" said Mr. Baldhill. "Bella'd make money out of him if she could sell him by auction in these parts, wouldn't she?"

"He certainly doesn't look like the same man," said Allerton. "The little girl has altered wonderfully for the better also. Good food, kind treatment, and freedom from care have had a wonderful effect upon both of them. Ibrahim tells me that he is one of the smartest men in the boat now, and always to be depended upon.

He is a good shot, too, and a fine horseman. None of the fellows care to play tricks on him."

"That sounds well," said Mr. Baldhill. "We may find some use for a chap like that, who can ride and track and tell the signs of the people here, before we get out of this. Well, there's nothing pays like treating your hands well. I never had a man, or my father before me, that wouldn't do anything for the family; and this chap may take the same line."

"Ibrahim says he is full of gratitude to you and Isabel for saving his sister's life, and that there is nothing in the world he would not do to show his feelings towards you."

"If he looks out he'll perhaps have a chance before all's done," said Mr. Baldhill. "But I shall never be easy now till I find myself within hail of a Red Sea steamer. I don't want any more war and revolution; I expect old New South Wales will be good enough for me for a longish spell, when I get there."

The man of whom they spoke had, indeed, changed much for the better during the last few weeks. His frame, developed by the results of generous diet, was erect and graceful; though comparatively slight, he showed an unusual degree of strength and activity. But the expression of his face had undergone the most astonishing transformation; instead of the deep, settled gloom of slavery, the frown of despair, in his large bright eyes was now the gladsome sparkle, the merry glance of him who is free to joy in the sunshine, to bathe in the dashing waters, to inhale the free desert breeze, to jest with his fellow men. His wounds had healed, though the scars were ineffaceable. The apparent disfigurement was slight. In the evening hour he made a point of talking with the child Ayesha, whose merry laugh had sounded so strangely incongruous at first with her worn and wasted appearance.

"I declare Omar has grown quite a splendid-looking young man," said Isabel one day. "I made a good pick, considering what low condition he was in. He takes pride in his clothes too, and is always clean and neat-looking. I wonder if he will be contented when we get to Sydney?"

"The climate ought to suit him, at any rate," said Allerton; "Merradoolah is as hot as any part of Nubia; it only wants a pyramid or two and you could fancy yourself above the Second Cataract again. He won't really be your slave, you know, when he gets there. The moment he touches British soil, or even the deck of a man-of-war, he is a free man again. See 'Jack's Yarn':—

> "'For every man is free
> Where the British colour flies;
> And I'll never give him up,' says he."

"And a grand idea too," said Isabel, holding up her head proudly. "'Rule Britannia,' &c. I don't suppose dad will grudge the thirty pounds, or I either. But I *should* like him to stay, and this funny little Ayesha."

"Ibrahim says he is always telling him of his boundless gratitude to you and the good Bahadoor, as he calls Mr. Baldhill, and that he will never leave you till he performs service in requital."

"And does Ibrahim believe him? You said the other day all these people were such cheats and deceivers."

"Ibrahim says this youngster is the son of a chief, and for that reason likely to show high feeling. Of course there are exceptions. I know that old Ibrahim risked his life for Sinclair and me on our first expedition."

"What was that in?" said Isabel, with an air of deep interest. "I should like awfully to hear about it."

"Oh, it was nothing particular," said Allerton, with some hesitation. "It was all Sinclair's fault—he's so rash—he got us into a row; there was a crowd of natives—at night-time, too, you know—and things looked ugly. I believe the turn of a straw would have decided our fate; but Ibrahim behaved like a trump. I never saw a man show more cool courage in my life. Afterwards he admitted that he knew we were in imminent danger. 'Our lives are in Allah's hands,' was all he said; then he lit his pipe and could not be induced to say another word."

On the following morning the party, in solemn

council assembled, concluded to inspect Dirv, near which the *Fatima* was accordingly moored. Ibrahim advised a visit to the King, as he called old Hassan-el-Wahab, who was but the sheik of this, the chief town of Nubia. The houses were of mud, but better built than most of those which they had seen. They were surrounded by gardens, in which grew melons and cucumbers in endless profusion. The children followed the white strangers in crowds, and the women expressed equal curiosity to behold their civilised sisters.

The women of Dirv were by no means deficient as to ornaments themselves; still they envied Isabel's gold watch, admired her earrings, and examined Marguerite's gloves with never-ending astonishment. They were much divided in opinion as to whether they were her own skin or not. If so, had she two skins, her face being of a different colour? Could she wash her hands with them? More than all, and vitally important, how could she eat? Marguerite's hands were touched and examined, and her gloves passed round the admiring circle ere a full explanation could be given. Were it not for their unlimited use of castor oil, the Nubian women would be agreeable of sight and society, as they are graceful of form and movement. The mistaken adherence to the "seringa" also detracted from the effect of many a face the features of which were regular and pleasing.

Isabel returned to the boat with a great prize, in the shape of a chameleon. This, she said, she was determined to domesticate and watch, so as to be in a position to state whether the proverbial change of colour took place.

"It certainly belongs to ancient Egypt," she said. "You cannot help wondering whether it has not just woke up, and stepped down from the figures on some tomb."

This much-quoted little beast was not more than eight inches long, lizard-shaped, flat-sided, with legs sufficient to carry the body well off the ground. Its colour was chiefly green, but it most certainly changed its hue to that of whatever object it might be standing near. Nothing could be more slow than its movements,

and the change of colour was similar. It always appeared to be standing still, and only by most attentive watching could one see that a step was made. At no moment could a real movement be detected, though, like a watch-hand passing over the sixty minutes, an advance was effected, as the flies discovered to their cost when the long tongue was shot out which drew them into the gaping mouth. The foot is perhaps its most curious member. It resembles two hands set palm to palm, and proves handy for wrapping round the smaller branches. Isabel tried hard to make a pet of it; but though flies, as always in Egypt, were bordering on a plague, it throve not. Perhaps the colours were not harmonious. It disappeared one morning, to her great disappointment.

Korosko, at which place the travellers arrived on the next day, is a village planted in a green valley surrounded by dark lofty precipices. Here through the deep and rugged gorge, Ibrahim told them, lay the desert route to Shendy. As the old Turkish governor at Keneh had informed them, they found a caravan and a troop of Egyptian cavalry *en route* to Sennaar. Their encampment had a strangely picturesque effect. Green and white tents (green is the Prophet's colour) were scattered among the palm trees. Their horses were picketed on a meadow near the shore. Camels and dromedaries were lying about among the houses. Swarthy men, with turban and flowing garments, sat upon carpets or mused, pipe-encumbered, amid the groves. Women were gleaning in the cornfields. Half-naked villagers with long black hair, girt with spear and shield, were watching their flocks, as may have done their ancestor Ishmael four thousand years ago.

When the neighbourhood of Korosko was reached, it had been noticed by nearly all the members of the party that Omar commenced to display a marked increase of interest. He asked questions repeatedly of Ibrahim. He pressed the Arab sailors, and the one solitary Nubian among the crew, closely and perseveringly as to the classification of the population of Korosko. When the last caravan had come in from the desert? When the

next might be expected? Whether the old King at Dirv was on good terms with the Khedive of Egypt or not? and other questions which no one was in a position to answer, and which gradually led up to more or less impatient rejoinders.

Following up the party at Dirv, he had gazed with eyes of entreaty and wistful questioning at the King and the white-bearded elders—the stalwart warriors of the tribe. But apparently in vain—as he turned away with a pained and disappointed air. At Korosko, too, he keenly scrutinised the inhabitants, the soldiers of the troop of horse, and from time to time the primitive inhabitants of the village. He was standing with a downcast air, recalling to Isabel his appearance and expression when first she saw him amid the despairing groups of slaves in the Hall of Sorrow, when suddenly through the wide and lonely desert, from the far horizon, over which his eyes restlessly roamed, came a solitary Bedawee.

Swiftly and silently came his "Heirie," or despatch dromedary, over the sea-like waste, towering like a ship in the desert, with its pilot Arab. The white robes of the rider fluttered in the breeze; his snowy turban shaded the swart visage, grimly determined and with an air of hardihood akin to recklessness. He exhibited in his attitude at once energy and repose. The pale-hued dromedary seemed ghost-like as it came fleeting by with its dark shadow, presently to disappear like a cloud on the horizon.

"My word, that fellow knows how to travel in a dry country," said Mr. Baldhill; "see what a bundle of greenstuff he has got slung for his camel. That waterskin holds more than one gallon or two either. Spear and shield, and a heavy sword at the saddle-bow! For fear that mightn't be enough, he has a knife strapped to his naked arm."

As the stern desert warrior came striding up at the smooth, deceiving pace of the fleet dromedary of Nejed and the Hedjaz, everyone was struck by the excited look and altered mien of Omar. His eyes were fixed with longing intensity upon the stranger Arab, for such he was. That high aristocratic contour could only

belong to a descendant of the haughty, tameless race that has for so many centuries resisted civilisation.

As the son of the desert approached the little group, apparently doubtful whether to accost them or to pass by and beyond their ken upon his own proper business, they were startled by a loud exclamation from Omar. He bounded forward like an antelope, and was presently seen to rush to the side of the dromedary, and to embrace the feet, the hands, the knees of the stranger.

"In the name of the Prophet!" said the Arab, "how comes it that I see the son of my sister here? Omar-ebn-Daood, are you a living man, or an evil Djin in his shape?"

"The great God who rules over all, and the Son of Mary, whom even your tribes hold sacred, have preserved me," said the young man. "I was sold into slavery by that dealer in the souls and bodies of men, Ras Michael, to one of Zebehr's agents. Our village was ravaged. My father, my two brothers, my mother, all are dead; ask not of them. (Here the stranger Arab smote his breast, and called upon Allah.) The child Ayesha and myself are alone living."

"You are well. Allah is merciful! Your face shines; your clothes are those of an Effendi. How comes this? Have you found the valley of diamonds or the ruby of Giamschid?"

"Not so. We were bought by a Bahadoor of the Inglesi. I am his daughter's slave. Their hearts are large. They bound up our wounds. The child Ayesha lives at her mother's feet. The Khanum also is gracious. We want for nothing."

"When the horsemen of the desert are gathered behind the banner of El Mahdi, the Inglesi and the Frankish Giaours will be swept into the sea," said the Arab.

"Not these, oh, brother of my mother! If the life of Omar-ebn-Daood is spared, every drop of his blood will be shed ere a hair of their heads be touched."

CHAPTER XXX

"SPEAK to that Bedawee, Ibrahim," said Allerton. "Tell him to rest and refresh his soul. Spare not the piastres. He has come from the Soudan, by the look of his 'delul.' His news may be more precious than gold. He is a friend of Omar's, I should say. Make him eat of our salt."

"I will not do so yet, but it may be done," said Ibrahim, thoughtfully stroking his beard. "I will talk with the youth Omar. He will deliver unto me the words of truth. This man is of the outer district of Ma-an, by his saffron-dyed vest, and his crooked dagger. He has suffered by the Wahabees, if he has either camels or mares to lose. Like the Howadjis we saw, he has been on some mission that is not told in the market-place."

Lounging near the spot where Omar was still engaged in earnest conversation with the stranger, Ibrahim managed to attract his attention. He proceeded to give several orders in an audible voice, which related to his ordinary work on board the *Fatima*. At the conclusion of the purposely brief address, he carelessly asked the name of the strange Bedawee and his errand.

"You see Akbar-ebn-Moharrek," said Omar, proudly.

"He is known to me by report," said Ibrahim. "All Egypt has heard of the brave warrior whose tribe fought so long against Abdallah-ebn-Feysul; his warriors were slaughtered, and his camels plundered by the thousand. My master, the great Inglesi Bahadoor, and the younger Bey, who is a nephew of the Khedive of all India, desire to offer him hospitality. He is come far and is doubtless weary."

"He has come far since midnight," said Omar, pointing to the western sun, which was now level with the horizon. A hundred and twenty miles is not next door, but the son of Moharrek is never weary. I will ask him if he will rest in the tents of the Frankish Bahadoor. There is much to tell, and it may be that he will alight."

Apparently the embassy was successful, as a few minutes afterwards the stranger was seen to dismount, and to walk side by side with Omar, while the patient

"delul" followed to a cluster of cottages, where, under a spreading palm, the saddle and loading were removed, and the swift dromedary attended to.

Some hours later, the stranger, accompanied by Omar, appeared at the gangway of the dahabieh, and intimated, in formally polite phrase, that he had rendered himself by bath and prayer worthy of an audience of the illustrious travellers from a far land, and that he awaited their permission to present himself.

Preceded by Ibrahim, he was immediately conducted to the fore-part of the vessel, where Mr. Baldhill and Allerton sat smoking in solemn conclave. A narghileh and coffee having been accepted, the guest solemnly bestowed himself upon a carpet.

Ibrahim offered himself as interpreter, and the conversation commenced.

"Ask him of his profession," said Allerton, "and what is his business in the Soudan, always supposing that he has no objection to tell."

"He is a man of truth," said Ibrahim, translating, "his words are few, and he can keep counsel. The boy Omar has informed him that the Inglesi Bahadoor and the Khanum—may her life be prolonged! have been merciful in the hour of their need to the children of his blood. He prostrates himself at their feet, and his life is in their hands."

By this time the impatience of Isabel could hardly be controlled. She was most anxious to behold an "Arab of the Poets," a true son of the desert.

> "Terrible he rode along
> With his Yemen sword for aid,
> All the kinsmen that he had
> Were the notches on its blade."

Syrian and Egyptian Arabs they had seen in shoals; but the true warrior of the desert, the tameless war-hawk of the waste, the grim, swart horseman redolent of the Nejed, Yemen, "Oman's green water," and all the legendary glories of the race, she had never happened to set eyes upon before. So she walked forward, followed by Marguerite, and, at a little distance, by Mrs. Baldhill and Marie.

The Bedawee fixed his gloomy eyes upon the fair-haired maiden, who came so near and looked on him so trustingly. At that moment there was a cry, and the child Ayesha came springing forward, and, clasping Isabel's hand, looked wonderingly upon the grave stranger, who sat solemn and sphinx-like in the centre of the little group.

A few words in an unknown tongue were interchanged between them, almost monosyllabic. Then the haughty warrior rose to his feet, and stood for a moment with folded arms and humble mien before the Frankish maiden, who with wide eyes was gazing intently at him.

He suddenly sank on one knee, and, touching Isabel's foot, made a slight gesture, as if he would have placed her shoe upon his heart. Then he raised himself calmly and with dignity, and spoke in a measured tone to Ibrahim, who proceeded to translate

"Akbar, the son of Moharrek, the chief of the Beni Abdul, near the green water of Oman, has never before bent the knee to living mortal. But he deems it no shame to do homage to the youthful Khanum whose beauty is transcendent as that of Nourmahal, and whose heart has been sent down by Allah from the Regions of the Faithful in order to encourage the sons of men. His life is henceforth in her hand. The children of his dead sister, with whom he played in infancy, she who married a rich merchant of the Soudan, a follower of the great Prophet of the Christians, and a favourite of the King of Abyssinia, would have been dead or degraded but for her—and the Bahadoor from beyond the black sea, to whom Allah has given wealth in proportion to his goodness. He lives now but for your service."

The speaker stood erect as the words flowed from his lips. His burning eyes fixed themselves upon the girl's face with such intensity that she stood with arrested gaze and parted lips as if spell-bound. His gesture was alike dignified and commanding, as his deep, sonorous voice rolled out the words of his address. Then he ceased as suddenly as he had commenced, and relapsing into silence, sank down upon his carpet and inhaled his narghileh.

It must be confessed that, as he stood there in the

silence of the eastern night, the deck being sufficiently lighted up to exhibit his contrast of costume, Akbar-ebn-Moharrek was a striking and picturesque figure. Having with the assistance of Omar procured a bath, he had also found the means of arraying himself in a costume more in accordance with his rank as a desert chieftain than the travel-stained garments in which he had first been made known to them.

He was dressed in a striped silk flowing robe, a blue and white "abbeh," and on his head a black "kefilah," embroidered with gold; this was fastened with the "aghal" of the Bedaween, made of black lambswool. A portion of this clothing he had brought with him—a part, no doubt, had been purchased in the bazaar of the town. For the rest, now, suitably dressed, he bore himself with the dignity which might be expected from the long-descended scion of a noble Arab family. No living man could have worn a more unconsciously haughty expression than the impassive personage now reclining before them. Misfortune, pride, reckless valour, were written on his face—perhaps contempt of human life when aroused; but over and above all the tameless soul of a race of warriors and hunters, by centuries of unbroken descent.

"I am by no means certain," said Allerton, after the customary amount of silent inhalation of the fragrant Turkish tobacco had been performed, "about the answers which were given to us by those straitlaced personages, Kasseem and Hoseyn, about the Wahabee tribes. I much fear that they will join this rascal of a Mahdi, in which case his march to Cairo may come to resemble that of Timour or Zenghis Khan. Will Akbar enlighten us? Ask him, Omar."

Omar, as directed, put certain interrogations to his relation, who after a pause of reflection, thus replied:

"Know then, O Bahadoor of the Inglesi, and thou, also, whose youth is as the palm-tree—who henceforth will be the brother of Akbar-ebn-Moharrek—that I have weighty tidings to impart. But swear by the tomb of thy father that thou wilt hold my speech sacred."

"Tell him that no word will pass our lips—that we seek but to be assured of our own safety, and to leave

this land for our distant homes with what speed we may."

"Know, then," said Akbar, "that I am even now upon a mission to my brethren from the Djebel Shammar to Yemen, from Ri'ad to Duhirah. They will gather at my tidings. The Prophet of the Soudan has sworn to drive the infidel and the Osmanli from Upper and Lower Egypt, from the further borders of the Soudan to the shore of the Red Sea. He has sworn by the Black Stone of the Kaaba to leave none alive. But fear not," he added, as if he thought that the expression of race-hatred which the idea lent to his features might not be reassuring; "not a hair of your heads shall be touched. The Bahadoor"—here he motioned towards Mr. Baldhill—"the Khanum, the 'bint' whose face is like a flower, and whose eyes are like the jewels of Giamschid—the Khanum with the dark hair; the younger Bey, whose arm is like that of Rustum and whose bullet summons death—they shall all travel in safety to the sea as if they were the children of Mohammed-ebn-Raschid himself. I have spoken."

"Ask him if he believes that the Shammar and the tribes of Yemen will rise and join the banner of the Mahdi?"

"Their rulers, with those of Nejed, of the Hedjaz and of Djebel Shammar, have long been pining to throw off the yoke of the Osmanli. If they can accomplish this and drive out the infidels, as their holy men have ordered, they will attain their ancient independence, and the ebn-Raschid will rule from the city of Iskander to the Indian Sea."

"But have they agreed to defy the Sultan, as well as the Khedive? Do they think they can measure forces with the troops who fought knee to knee with the Russ at Plevna and in the Balkans?"

"They have not forgotten how Ibrahim Pasha persuaded Abdallah-ebn-Saood, the Emir of Deriyeh, to deliver himself up, and then treacherously beheaded him after promising safe conduct. They can wait and keep counsel. But they believe that this is the appointed predestined hour, and that El Mahdi is the man fated to restore the ancient glories of the Beni Ismail."

"But about this safe conduct. Ask him that, Omar. How shall we persuade the Bedaween between Keneh and Kosseir when we meet them that we are friends?"

Akbar-ebn-Moharrek considered long and deeply ere he answered.

"Will you give into my hand the youth Omar for a season? The son of the lost Leila, the sister of my heart?"

"Tell him," said Isabel, "that Omar is free to go or stay, also the child Ayesha. They were not bought for gain or service, but chiefly for their safety, and to redeem them from the Hall of Sorrow."

"The matter is accomplished," said the Arab, gazing with admiration at the girl's eager face. "The 'bint' is an angel from heaven. He will make our path easy. I will send back the youth Omar with guides and a guard of horsemen who will die one by one ere a rude word is said to her."

As for Omar himself, he spoke not, but his eyes expressed a boundless depth of loyalty and devotion. He knelt before his young mistress, and kissed the ground before her feet, bowing himself as to a saint.

His august relative seemed about to relapse into silence, but suddenly appeared struck with a new idea.

"Ask the fair daughter of the Inglesi if there is anything save the Roc's egg or the Pearl of Giamschid that I can send her, in memory of the Beni Moharrek, when she goes to a far land?"

Isabel hesitated, and then, with less than her usual intrepidity, answered: "I should like a real Arab horse from the desert—a pair if they can be got. My father will pay their cost in every way, and I should be grateful all my life."

When this was translated to Akbar a smile irradiated his dark visage for the first time.

"The lady of the Inglesi shall have a pair of steeds, of wind-drinkers, that Balkis herself may not have scorned to ride when she went to visit Suleiman-ebn-Daood. They will remind her of the Arab tents and of the desert, and of the children of Moharrek whom she stretched out the hand of mercy to save."

Akbar-ebn-Moharrek upon this rose to his feet, and

with a salutation of grave respect took leave of the party for the night. His kinsman Omar accompanied him—presumably to make arrangements for the joint expedition—to see about the purchase of a dromedary and other requisites for a far and fast ride over the desert.

Ibrahim had been instructed to make it plain to Akbar that money would not matter with the Bahadoor, as he had come to call Mr. Baldhill. A bag of piastres was given to Omar, in spite of the assurance of his uncle that none were necessary. But Ibrahim knew the Arab nature well. "It is all very well for them to talk," he said, "and this Akbar-ebn-Moharrek is a man of deeds; I have heard of his family before. They are good friends; and as for enemies, Eblis himself could teach them nothing. Still, it is good to be known as Abou-baksheesh (the father of bounty) which these Nile people always call the Bahadoor. It inspires confidence, and the wild desert tribes will consider him a sort of Sultan of the English, with gold untold in his hand, and bow down accordingly."

By the end of that day matters had so far progressed that all the preparations were made for Omar to start towards Kosseir with his distinguished kinsman. A dromedary had been procured—not such a "wind-drinker" as the "delul" which Akbar had appeared on—a true "bint Edeyhan" (or daughter of Edeyhan), where the best dromedaries in Arabia are bred—smooth-skinned, smooth-paced, swift, tireless, thoroughbred in her way as the best steed of the Nejed. All this Ibrahim explained to the party, adding that he could see that Akbar's dromedary was a "Naamyeh," an animal that you could ride without spilling a cup of water.

As for Omar, he was enchanted with the prospect opening before him. Once more mounted and his face turned to the desert, with a sword and a long gun, accoutred like a free Bedawee, he could hardly contain his joy. He wept at parting with his sister, but assured her that he would soon be back and bring with him a troop of the Beni Abdul, who would be able to escort them in safety to Kosseir, and to defend the Khanum and the "bint" from all the Bedaween between here

and the Shammar. As for the horses, they should be the direct descendants of the steeds which had carried the Prophet and his namesake, Omar, in the Hegira.

One point required decision, and several discussions were necessary before the matter could be finally decided. Where was the relief party to find the travellers? For more reasons than one it seemed inadvisable to remain in the same place. To go further from the river in any direction would serve to direct attention to their party. It was not any spot which would serve for a "ghazee" or foray party of Bedaween to assemble at. It was judged better to take as a rallying point some well-known locality which travellers affected, and which they might reach in pursuance of their lawful occupation as travelling Englishmen, a people well known to be insane in their pursuit of the strange and wonderful.

It was therefore finally decided that they should rendezvous at Thebes, which they had passed on their upward voyage, being impatient to reach Philæ.

The glories of Luxor and Karnak would serve to distract them while awaiting with such patience as they might the arrival of the guard of honour, headed by Omar, who was to guide them through the desert to the coast, whence they might take ship, and so bid farewell to the scene of adventures which now promised to be more exciting than agreeable.

When the day dawned Omar and his kinsman had vanished. Long ere the stars were out of the sky—Bedaween fashion—they had quitted their resting-place, and were striking swift and silently across the dim, boundless desert, which so soon appears when out of sight of the river and the green irrigated meadow lands in its vicinity.

"What a wonderfully lucky chance it was, mother," said Isabel, "that I was tempted to buy those two poor things. It shows one should give way to one's impulses. It always pays to do good. I wonder it doesn't strike more people that way. If we hadn't owned Omar and Ayesha, this terrible old Arab would have passed us by, and perhaps have been the first to help some of his friends to rob and murder us."

"Suppose he changes his mind, and does something

of the kind yet?" suggested Allerton; "there is plenty of time."

"He is a man to fear, but also to be trusted," said Isabel; "don't you think so, mother? And poor Omar! I would venture all I'm worth that he comes back. Just fancy, about the horses too! I must get dad to make a princely offering to the tribe, to keep our name up and for the honour of Australia. I could not bear to take them for nothing. If we only get them safe out, it will be worth the whole expense. I'm glad we're not to miss Thebes—hundred-gated Thebes—after all. Ain't you, mother?"

"I should be quite happy, my dear, if I never saw a ruin, or a temple, or a pyramid again as long as I live," answered that lady with decision. "I'm sick and tired of them. I hope that Thebes will be the very last. That's the only light in which it will give me any pleasure."

"And me too," said Mr. Baldhill. "If ever I——" and here, fearing perhaps that he was about to express his disapproval of Egypt and Eastern travel generally perhaps too realistically, Mr. Baldhill walked forward and relieved his feelings by filling his pipe with great vehemence and determination.

"Now that we are at Korosko," said Allerton, after a considerable period of reflection. "I think we need not leave our quarters for a few days. We are more likely to gain correct information here than in most places, and it's just possible that some other way of escape might present itself. The route over the desert to a Red Sea port is not over-pleasant or safe, to my mind, the son of Moharrek notwithstanding."

"I feel that savage and desperate with being boxed up here week after week," said Mr. Baldhill, "that I could find it in my heart to charge right back through the middle of these beggars and chance it. But women regular tether a man. We must ride a waiting race, and will be lucky if we can make a rush on the post."

"I think we shall come out right in the end," said Allerton, musingly. "But in war-time the risks are immensely increased. Burton told me at Cairo that he was certain there would be a row of some sort among

these people, but he never expected it would be as big a thing as it has grown to."

"How are we to know what's going on?" said Mr. Baldhill. "We cannot have one of them Arab fellows coming across with news every day; and I don't know as we can believe 'em when they do come."

"All the dahabiehs stop here," said Allerton. "Most likely there will be one here within the week. We can get a good inkling of how things are likely to turn out from the next Nile party."

This appeared to be such sensible advice that Mr. Baldhill expressed himself as willing to abide by it, and thereupon concluded to impart the same to his worthy helpmate, as well as to his more adventurous daughter, of whose acquiescence he was by no means so certain.

"As long as we have to loaf about," she said, "until these Bedaween come to meet us, I dare say we may as well do it in one place as another. I shouldn't wonder if we do meet a few strangers here before we're done, and it would be satisfactory to know exactly how matters have gone. Ibrahim told us just now that there was a report among the townspeople of a great battle fought in the desert, and the English and Egyptian troops beaten—routed."

"I don't believe it," said Allerton. "They had Baker Pasha with them, one of the best cavalry officers in Europe. The troops are certainly Egyptian, but well drilled and well led they are not so bad. I cannot believe it."

"Ibrahim was doubtful," said Isabel. "The men who brought the news had no interest to serve in not telling the truth. He was disposed to believe it."

"We can find out in the morning," said Allerton; "bad news is never long hidden. It will make these people disagreeable and impudent if their side has won a real victory; that's the worst of it."

"The story is that the English were outnumbered—that the Egyptian troops showed base cowardice, leaving their officers to be butchered, while they ran in every direction, or threw themselves down in abject fear.

"They are the greatest cowards in Africa, which is

a wide word," said Allerton; "but I always thought that drill and the moral influence of their leaders would enable them to stand up against such a rabble as the Mahdi could bring against them. It will of course be a different matter if the great tribes of Yemen and the Hedjaz declare for him."

"But has not Gordon gone to Khartoum?" said Marguerite, with a certain hesitation of manner. "Surely the English Government will not leave him to his fate? They must make some demonstration in the Soudan that would protect him from treachery or violence."

"If they ever intend to do anything they may send troops from Assouan, which is the frontier town of Egypt proper, and in that case we might see the advance guard at Korosko before we leave. Ibrahim says if the British had sent a moderate force to Berber, which they could have reached by Suakim, order could have been kept in the lower Soudan. As it is, there is every fear that there will be local risings in the interest of the Mahdi, when of course the garrisons of Egyptian soldiers will be powerless.

"They will only have their own country back again, then," said Isabel.

"Unfortunately, that is not the worst to be feared. At Berber and other towns in the Soudan there is now a mixed population of Egyptian *employés* and of European and British residents. No mercy will be shown to them, and of course massacres and outrages may take place."

"One feels inclined to long for old Mehemet Ali and his iron rule again," said Isabel, indignantly. "He at least knew what he meant, and so did the people he governed. It does not seem as if our Government had made up its mind what to do or what to leave undone."

"No greater mistake can be made in dealing with half-civilised races," said Allerton, "Accustomed to rule and be ruled wholly by fear, they put down to conscious weakness all uncertainty or merciful consideration. And once the prestige of England is lost in this war-tossed region, it will take generations to recover."

"I think I have seen that it was the intention of this

present Government" said Marguerite, "to permit the retirement of the military and civil colonists of Egypt, and that General Gordon had instructions to carry out such a policy."

"That may or may not have been a prudent step," said Allerton. "It is intelligible, at all events. But what all Britons will have to complain of is that no sufficient military force has been allowed him with which to carry out these instructions. A hasty declaration of intention to abandon the Soudan, and Egypt generally, has had the effect of encouraging revolt and weakening the loyalty of those tribes which would have remained true to us."

"It is a pottering, undecided, contemptible policy," said Isabel, impetuously. "In this and other late actions, I feel ashamed of the British Government. They are fond of sneering at our Colonial ideas and general policy. But if Parkes and Robertson, or any New South Wales ministry, couldn't manage matters better than that, I'm ready to turn hospital nurse and wear an apron and a white cap all the days of my life."

CHAPTER XXXI

It was decided to remain a week longer at Korosko, and while there Allerton gained some additional evidence respecting Gordon, and the mission on which he had been sent by the British Government.

It appeared that he had gone, in Mr. Gladstone's own words, "not for the purpose of reconquering the Soudan, or to persuade the chiefs of the Soudan, the Sultans at the head of their troops, to submit themselves to the Egyptian Government." He went for the double purpose of evacuating the country by extricating the Egyptian garrisons, and reconstituting it by giving back to these Sultans their ancestral powers, suspended during the period of Egyptian occupation. General Gordon had in view the withdrawal from the country of

no less than thirty thousand persons under military service in Egypt. It was for this purpose only that he left England on January 18th, 1884.

"And was he to do all this by simply announcing that the British Government wished it?" said Isabel, "or that, as a mutual friend, he thought they could not do better than leave the Soudan to the Soudanese? It reads like a child's fairy tale: 'So the Prince came and told the army of the wicked Sultan to go back to their own country, and they went.' Was he to have no troops, no money, no authority at his back, or only to trust to his high personal prestige?"

"It really looks very like it," said Allerton, to whom this query had been addressed; "but when he left Cairo on the 27th of January he went, not only as British High Commissioner, but as the Khedive's Governor-General of the Soudan. The son of the Sultan of Darfur also went with him. The Khedive, at Gordon's suggestion, had restored to his father his ancient dominions as far as he was concerned. General Graham went with his old comrade as far as Assouan."

"Where did they go next?"

"They came to this very place. Gordon and Colonel Stewart then bought dromedaries and rode across the desert to Abou-Hamed, two hundred and fifty miles. For nine days nothing was heard of them, and as they had no military escort, there was great anxiety, you may be sure."

"Well, it shows that people may ride through the desert without being eaten up," said Isabel. "That sounds rather encouraging, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but this was before the rising of El Mahdi and Osman Digna. It is the change from peace to war."

"*Vogue la galère*, as Marie says," replied the undismayed damsel; "we shall get through somehow. But my life will be overshadowed if anything happens to that peerless paladin, Gordon. Is there any news as to what he did when he got to Khartoum?"

"The two points in his instructions from Lord Granville were the evacuation of the Soudan, apparently a most useless and troublesome possession, and the safety of the native Christians and Egyptian *employés*, with

their wives and children. The number of Europeans at Khartoum is small. However, Ibrahim says that ten or fifteen thousand people will want to move northwards from Khartoum alone when the Egyptian garrison is withdrawn. At the other towns the same calculation in proportion may be made. The Khedive is pleased to say that he is 'most earnestly solicitous that no efforts should be spared to insure the retreat both of the ordinary urban population and of the Egyptian garrisons without loss of life.' Gordon is given full discretionary power to retain the troops for what period he may think necessary, and a credit of one hundred thousand pounds is opened for him."

"That sounds better," said Isabel; "but what is the use of fifty thousand of these wretched Egyptian troops? It doesn't matter of how many an army is composed if they all run away, does it?"

"I am afraid not," said Allerton. "The whole task could have been easily accomplished but for the sudden uprising of this Mohammed Ahmed, and the complication of a religious war as well as one of race. Otherwise, Gordon's prestige in the Soudan was resistless, after the splendid manner in which he broke down the slave-dealing system when he was out there in 1876."

"This is the second time he has been at Khartoum," said Marguerite. "What a sad ending to his glorious career if he should find a grave there; what a triumph for the powers of evil!"

"We are all in the hands of Allah, as Ibrahim says," said Allerton. "None can tell what the issue may be. Yes, he has been twice at Khartoum. Pray Heaven it may not be once too many. On his first expedition he went by water to Suakim, and travelled through the desert to Berber. He had an escort of two hundred troops, so that it took him a fortnight. Afterwards he rode it on his 'delul'—in nine days two hundred and eighty miles."

"That wasn't very fast. I could do that myself on old Wallaby," said Isabel, "and think nothing of it. I suppose dromedaries shake a good deal, though. But he is a splendid hero. I remember crying my eyes out at school over one of his letters about the little wasted

skeletons of slave children, and dancing for joy when he hanged a slave-dealer."

"He is the Man of Destiny," put in Marie, timidly.

"He is all that, and more; the hero of the age," said Isabel. "I could fall down and worship him. A man who defies danger and death has had a charm for our sex in all ages. I saw a portrait of him in England, and there is something in the expression of his eyes which fascinates one. That calm, steadfast, unflinching look never yet belonged to a man of average character, or uncertain purpose. There seems a smouldering fire behind his eyes, ever ready to blaze forth with resistless might. You are right, Marie, *ma belle amie*, for once. He is not a man as other men. I feel as if I should lie down and die if anything happened to him, or if I were a man, say like Barnardo del Carpio in the ballad—

> '"No more; there is no more," he said,
> "To lift the sword for now."'

Surely they will never let him die. God's providence must be on his side."

"It is hard to say," said Allerton. "He is very imprudent. He has made enemies of all the slave-dealers and the tribes connected with them, such as the Waled el Michael and Haroun, who belonged to the Sultan of Darfur's family. They will all band against him, and what is more, will work on the feelings of the very people he has come to protect."

"That is the common fate," said Marguerite. "The Deliverer is crucified, the wicked flourish; justice is not done upon this earth. No wonder we are told that in the life to come all burdens will be lifted, and all sorrow and sighing shall cease."

"I wonder that any one can doubt it for a moment," said Mrs. Baldhill. "But does not the Bible say, 'Then were they in great fear where no fear was, for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee. Thou hast put them to shame because God has despised them.' Let us trust it may be so with General Gordon, for he is a good man."

"Surely he will get safe out of it," said Isabel,

dreamily. "I could find it in my heart to go in disguise and warn him of his peril, as people used to do in the Middle Ages; only I do not exactly see what good it would do. If we could have got the real truth out of Hoseyn and his friend, or 'that man of blood' Akbar (I feel sure he is a man of blood, like Mehemet Ali, or Ali Pasha of Tepeleni), we might have done something. But we are powerless to help ourselves or others."

"Khartoum is nearly seven hundred miles from here —two hundred and thirty to Abou Hamed on the Nile," said Allerton. "The road lies through an awful rocky desert, four hundred and fifty miles up the river to Khartoum. When the English relief force gets there, if they ever send one, it is hard to know what they will find."

"It is hopeless, no doubt; but I shall lose my trust in England if anything happens to my hero. Oh! how I wish some fresh people would come with the latest news."

Not that day or the next, but within the last period fixed by Isabel, the welcome intelligence was received that a strange dahabieh had arrived in the night, and was moored under the bank near their own.

The travellers were at once secured as guests, and proved to be two young, unattached Britons, rolling in wealth, who, having made up their minds to see Upper Egypt, had refused with the obstinacy of the race to be turned from their purpose.

"Dan-jah! Why, there is dan-jah evewywha-ah, appeahs to me," said the Honourable Bertie Stanhope, a tall, fair-haired scion of the aristocracy, whose *traînante* intonation harmonised so wondrously with the languid *insouciance* of his whole bearing that the sternest critic hesitated to call it affectation. "Smallpox, cholewah, shipweck—ah, matwimony—have all thweatened us—eh, Danvers? What can a few Awabs, maw or less, signify?"

"Speak for yourself, Master Bertie," said his comrade, a short, broad-shouldered, resolute-looking man, with crisp dark hair, and an air of mingled recklessness and curiosity. "I know whom the matrimony menaced most, but plead guilty to quarantine and a cyclone in

the China Seas. Still, ten thousand Arabs or so seem unfair odds."

"All a mattah of destiny," said the Honourable Bertie. "This climate—the rivah—the—ah—Turkish tobacco, all suit me wondah-fully. One must go somewha-ah, you know. I shall stay till I'm turned out."

"That's just like you. He is the most obstinate ruffian," said Sir John Danvers, apologetically, apparently for the edification of Isabel, who burst out laughing at the ludicrous unfitness of the concluding epithet with reference to the *soigné* elegance of the individual designated. "I can understand your taking any idiotic line. Of course it does not matter particularly what becomes of us, but it is a different matter with these ladies and gentlemen. May I ask how you came to be *plantés là* just now at the seat of war?"

Allerton answered the query. "The fact is we had been doing the Nile, like yourselves, and did not hear of these troubles in Alexandria and Cairo, much less in the Soudan, till it was too late to return by the way we came."

"That was not our case precisely. We could have got back directly after Tel-el-Kebir if we had liked. But this pig-headed friend of mine—excuse the strength of the adjective—declined to turn back under any circumstances; and here we are, with a bad chance of getting away and all reasonable probability of having our throats cut if we stay where we are."

"Exactly our position," said Isabel, smiling; "but when things are at their worst they must mend. I think it's great fun. People have so little real excitement in this world. Bloodshed and battles are things we only read about."

"Quite my ideah," said the Honourable, putting up his eyeglass, and regarding Isabel with undisguised admiration. "Ladies so warely see things in that light. I take it we are all well armed. Jack heah has an Amewican wepeatah, could kill scores of Awabs befaw they came neah him. Give you my honour. We might either entwench ourselves here or make a dash across the desert."

"That's just what we are going to do," said Isabel,

clapping her hands. "We are only waiting for a guide and an escort. Oh! won't it be splendid. Now you and Sir John have come we can join forces and do anything. Don't you think we ought to make straight for Khartoum and relieve Gordon?"

Everybody laughed at this. The conversation became general, and strayed away from the war topic, which was reserved until the men of the party could have a quiet discussion about ways and means. The situation was sufficiently grave, yet both Allerton and Mr. Baldhill were relieved by the appearance of the Englishmen, whom they rightly judged to be men on whom they could depend for advice and assistance in the strait in which they now found themselves.

As there was no immediate probability of battle, it was resolved to invite their newly-made friends to dinner on board the *Fatima*, where, after the evening's entertainment, they could at their leisure decide upon a course of action. This arrangement quite suited the ladies of the party, particularly Isabel, who took a deep interest in the Honourable for the calm recklessness with which he had endorsed her views about the general desirableness of war, and the pleasurable excitement of actual combat.

Allerton and her father looked grave when she enunciated these sentiments; but she replied to their warnings and cautionary speeches by a counter-argument, not without effect:

"You see, if we really *have* to risk our lives to get out of this difficulty, which we have not brought upon ourselves, we may as well do it creditably, mayn't we? Being afraid and tearful, and bemoaning the day we ever left our friends and our worsted work, as some girls would do, can't surely make matters better. No! dad. I don't undervalue the danger. But why should not I enjoy the excitement, if my nature says, 'Yes, by all means'? Is nobody to have any courage but you men, do you think?"

"But it's flying in the face of Providence to be so full of spirits, my darling," said Mrs. Baldhill, "when for all you know we may be dead and buried in a few weeks, or left out to dry on those horrid sands that is,

or sold for slaves, and I don't know what all!" Here Mrs. Baldhill's eyes filled with natural tears at the terrific suggestions.

"Don't cry, mother dear!" said Isabel; "I shall never be a slave as long as there is a charge in my revolver, and I've been practising lately, and nearly hit an alligator the other morning. At any rate, I made him move off a sandbank. Besides, the women in the Bible showed plenty of courage in the old Jewish wars, and perhaps near these very places. Think of Jael, though she was a treacherous thing, and Deborah, and the rest of them; and you must have faith, you know, that God will bring us all safely out of our troubles."

"May He do so, my darling child!" said the fond mother, smoothing the bright hair, and pressing to her the soft glowing face. "We must pray, all of us, to be delivered from danger, and to be restored to our own happy, peaceful, native land. I wish we had never left it."

"It's too late, now, mother, to wish that. Think of all the glorious things we shall have to look back on when we do get safe into dear old Sydney Harbour again. It *will* be very like getting to heaven, I must admit. But we must make ready to receive our distinguished guests."

The entertainment was successful, Mrs. Baldhill having ransacked her stores of preserved dainties and produced surprising results. It seemed that the strangers had, from want of forethought, run short of provisions except what were procurable from the Nile villages. They were therefore in a position to fully appreciate the unwonted luxuries which were comprehended in Mrs. Baldhill's *cuisine*, supplemented by artful compositions from Marie's Parisian recipes. If the elder voyagers were superior in their resources of hospitality, the new arrivals contributed more than their fair share of entertainment, from the novelty and variety of their information. They confirmed the rumour of the defeat and death of Hicks Pasha between El Duem and Obeid, the more exasperating after his successful campaign in Sennaar.

"Wasn't the celebrated war correspondent, O'Dono-

van with Hicks's column?" said Allerton. "I heard an Indian officer mention it when I was at Cairo."

"Too true, unluckily," said Sir John. "The last word came from him in a telegram from Sange Hamferid Camp, south-west of El Duem. No one quite knows how they perished, and perhaps we shall never know."

"Can't see that it makes much difference," said the Honourable Bertie. "It wouldn't comfort me in my last moments to know that the newspapah fellahs had the latest particulars."

"I think I should like some one to be saved to tell the tale," said Isabel, softly. "I must give strict instructions to Omar that he is on no account to be killed, if we have a battle, but is to escape and bear the news of our heroic ending."

"Come, come, Miss Baldhill," said Allerton; "I shall have to be ceremonious if you begin to talk of worms and epitaphs, and tell sad stories of the death of kings. We are not going to have any such sensational wind-up. I must tell you, gentlemen, that we are only awaiting the return of our emissary, who is accompanied by one of the best-known Arab leaders in Northern Arabia, to clear out across to Kosseir, and take to the Red Sea, which I trust, as we are fleeing from Egypt (here he bowed reverently, and looked across to Mrs. Baldhill), will be a channel of safety."

"I was only looking possibilities in the face," said Isabel; "but how is Akbar to get to these Northern tribes and Yemen, so as to send round his 'fiery cross'?"

"He and Omar are well on their way to Kosseir by this time. They have been gone five days. The distance is not above three hundred and fifty miles. Our agreement, enforced by Mr. Baldhill's piastres, which Akbar will find useful when he gets into the Hedood, whatever he may say, is that Omar is to be despatched back from Kosseir with a force of a hundred picked men, whose good faith he will guarantee."

"And where will he go himself?" asked Isabel; "and what will become of his mission?"

"That he will not dare to abandon, but after getting you two steeds of price, he will cross over the Red Sea in a native vessel to El Bahr, from whence he can send messengers to Medinah, journeying on through the Hedood to Mecca, whence of course intelligence will radiate by means of dervishes and fakirs over the whole Arabian Peninsula. He can take the pilgrims' road to the Nejd himself, leaving messengers to penetrate Yemen and Hadramaut. Once at Riad, he can communicate with every tribe of Bedaween from the Shammar to Muscat."

"A tolerably wide range of country and population," said Sir John, "and are all these horsemen of the desert to arise and gather amidst these God-forsaken Nile ruins once more? Why, it will be the march of Tamerlane!"

"Time will tell," said Allerton. "We must get across the line of march before the general order is given. You see our policy, I think?"

"Most supewiow diplomacy, if we can cawwy it out," said the Honourable. "I twust Miss Baldhill appwoves."

. . . . . .

It was agreed that after a day or two's delay, which was required by their newly-arrived acquaintances for certain repairs and the laying-in of stores, the downward voyage towards Keneh should be commenced. They could pursue their journey in a leisurely manner until they arrived opposite the historic plain of Thebais, and while making a last lingering exploration of these unequalled ruins might so allay their anxiety until the arrival of their escort and the faithful Omar.

Now that a settled order of march was arranged, a perceptible improvement in the spirits of the party took place. All traces of anxiety vanished, and Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill, not unused to comparatively perilous travel, looked upon the route as assured, though probably beset with difficulties. The newly-found companions busied themselves with methodical labours relative to their equipment during the day, and in the evening came over to the *Fatima* party which they enlivened by

their tales of many lands and their general breadth of society information.

"When we get safe to Aden," said Isabel, "you must really wind up with a trip to Australia, Mr. Stanhope. We have a few things worth seeing, and then you will be able to say that you have been all round the world."

"Been the gweat aim of my existence to see Austwaliah befaw I die," said the Honourable. "A countwy which pwoduces such cwicketers and wowing men must be intewesting. Cousin in New Zealand somewhaah, too; Hot Lakes, I think. May as well go; eh, Jack."

"In for a penny, in for a ponnd," said the gallant baronet. "If you'll put us on the deck of a Red Sea steamer, Miss Baldhill, we're your humble servants as far as Botany Bay."

CHAPTER XXXII

ANOTHER day and both dahabiehs are gliding down the current of the broad river, quitting, with their passengers, it may be for ever, the great oasis and the lofty cliffs of Korosko.

Wady Selou (Valley of Lions), whose only lions are of stone, Guerif-Hassan, and Valabsti are passed with only the ordinary everyday incidents of Nile travel. The cliffs of Philæ, lost and lovely, the cataracts, the temple of Bedod, succeed one another like the phantoms of a dream. They glide past as if scenes in a former state of existence. At Assouan the monotonous lotus-eating life was varied for the first time.

This, the frontier town of Egypt proper, presented a very different appearance from those which they had passed of late. It was occupied by a mixed Egyptian and European force. The familiar uniforms of the line, the morning and evening tattoo, the steady tramp of the regulars, were sights and sounds pleasing as

familiar to their countrymen. News, too, was abundant, though much of it was of a dark complexion. Here for the first time they heard circumstantial accounts of the defeat of Baker Pasha and the rout of his troops, of the fall of Abou Hamed, of Berber, of Shendy, of Obeid. They could hardly disguise their grief and astonishment.

"As we were passing this place in April," said Danvers, "we heard of a memorial having been sent to the British Consul, Sir Evelyn Baring, from the merchants and *employés*, European residents and others at Berber. They said they came to the Soudan relying on the protection of the British Government. If that failed, then they were handed over to death and dishonour."

"The consequences they foresaw have been too literally fulfilled," said Allerton. "When Berber fell before the local rabble, and not the troops of the Mahdi, the Governor and most of the garrison and townspeople were put to the sword."

"Comes of not doing things in pwoper time," said the Honourable, who had "fawmally been in the ah-my."

"If half these troops had been sent on to Korosko or Wady Halfa, while two or three companies could have been dropped at Berber, by way of Suakim, they would have kept all the Lower Soudan quiet."

"Precisely," said Allerton, "with the communication kept open, the Egyptian population might have been withdrawn gradually. But this sudden abandonment of the country has held out a premiun to anarchy."

"And has not Gordon written anything from Khartoum?" asked Isabel. "He writes to the purpose, I believe."

"They say that in one letter—the last received—these words occur: "Then I am to understand that I am abandoned?"

"Abandoned of men, but not of God," said the enthusiastic girl. "But what better chance has he than these garrisons that have fallen? Is there nothing that he could do?"

"He might make a dash into the Equatorial provinces," said Allerton. "He is at home there; he might form an African government, and organising a

disciplined army out of indifferent materials, a feat he has achieved before, make alliances with some of the independent Arab leaders. Everything is possible to a man of his cool courage and daring genius."

"What a glorious triumph it would be were he to extricate himself and solve the problem without British aid! Why isn't it nearer to Australia? What a splendid body of volunteers he could get from us, if there were only a few hundred miles to ride, but we are so far off from everywhere."

"Some day you may find the value of your isolation," said Allerton, meaningly.

Here it was judged prudent, as well as interesting, to remain a day or two. Among the officers of the selected corps of the Egyptian Army raised by Sir Evelyn Wood were several acquaintances of Mr. Stanhope's. He was invited at once to join their mess with his Australian friends, and much mutually agreeable hospitality prevailed. The presence of ladies of distinguished appearance could not but be an event in such a place. Isabel was at once elected to the proud position of "belle of Assouan" in right of her youth and presumed heiressship, as well as her *beaux yeux*. Marguerite became the object of special interest to the more fastidious few, who appreciated her aristocratic bearing and evident culture. Marie was by no means destitute of admirers among the youthful subalterns, while Mrs. Baldhill and her husband were voted "awfully jolly," and the most good-hearted people living.

Isabel was charmed with the whole thing and daily rode to inspect the troops. When it was discovered that she was a peerless horsewoman, the interest in her tastes, character, and performances generally rose to fever heat. Marguerite, too, shared in the general admiration; her health was now fully restored, and having been fond of riding in her old country-house days, she had since her stay in the East taken every opportunity of recovering form in that respect. As they rode side by side, therefore, escorted by a crowd of distinguished military men to parade on the Maidān, the two Australian ladies, as they were held to be, formed the theme of constant speculation.

"The tall, dark, slender woman was the widow of an Australian Prime Minister. She had immense properties in South Australia, but by the terms of her husband's will, was to forfeit all but five hundred a year if she married again."

"That's why she looks so melancholy sometimes," said an adventurous subaltern. "She's the handsomest woman I've seen for years, and no end clever. I'd go in for her myself and cut the service, if I thought the coin was all right."

"Better ask her," said another *militaire*. "She mightn't take it amiss; but they say that that big fellow with the fair beard is engaged to her. He's an Australian, too, I believe, and money's no object to them."

"I'm dead gone on the fair girl," said a Major of Irregular Horse, bronzed by an Indian sun. "She's an angel of beauty, and rides like one, too; doesn't she?"

"They say she'll have a hundred thousand down on her wedding day, and the rest of the half million when the old buffer drops."

"Go in and win, Major," said the youngster who had spoken first; "only consult Stanhope and Danvers, there's no saying what running they may have been making. Bertie is not a marrying man; but if Danvers means business, he's a dangerous customer."

"I hope to heaven they'll stay here, or the Mahdi comes. It's such a beastly dull hole that we want a bit of love or war to enliven us. Wonder whether we could manage to give a ball?"

"No use. I heard Miss Baldhill say yesterday that she had made a vow not to indulge in any worldly pleasure or recreation until news came that Gordon was safe. That if anything happened to him she was going into mourning for a year, if not into a convent."

"What a bother everybody makes about Gordon," said the younger sub. "He's a fine fellow, no doubt; but he must drop when his time comes, like any other man. Now if anything happens to Loring or the Major here, who do you suppose will go into mourning?"

"Depends upon circumstances, dear boy," said the Major, stroking his heavy moustache. "But the fact is, one fellow comes to be the fashion, and nobody else

is looked at. Fortune of war, I suppose. Well, I envy no man his luck."

It must be confessed that, in spite of the uncertainty of their future operations, the days passed pleasantly at Assouan.

Marguerite and Isabel held a daily court at the afternoon tea-hour which they instituted on board the *Fatima*. Mrs. Baldhill was discovered to be a valuable and an instructive referee on Australian matters, as more than one of the military youth had a brother or cousin in the Great South Land; while Mr. Baldhill's cheery good-nature and unaffected hospitality endeared him to the whole society.

When it gradually became known that the party contemplated making their way across the desert to Kesseyr, a strong protest was entered against the proposed route.

"Why not go back by the river now? The line is quite safe to Assioot, the first two hundred and fifty miles. And there's a steamer up and down every day of the week to Cairo."

"We arranged to go the other way," said Mr. Baldhill. "It would be treating the man we made the bargain with shabbily if we went back on him. I think we'll see it out, now we're started."

"If it were not for the ladies, I'd say it wouldn't make much difference," said the Major. "But there might be trouble in the desert with these wandering Arab fellows. I really don't think it's half safe."

Mr. Baldhill, however, like many other people, was anxious and troubled in mind when he thought there was only one way open to him, but now that there was a choice of paths, and with the probability of one being much the safer of the two, he somewhat illogically clung to his first decision.

As for Isabel, she wouldn't hear of any departure from their agreement with Omar and Akbar-ebn-Moharrek "It will be breaking faith with him, and would lower the English character in the eyes of the Arabs. Besides, nobody would know what became of Omar, and I shouldn't get my horses. It's not to be thought of."

Finally it was decided, not without a protest from Mrs. Baldhill, who distrusted the desert, and was quite in her element among the military "friends" with whom she found herself surrounded. So the time having been exceeded which they had proposed to stop at Assouan, the voyage was recommenced.

It was a sad and solemn leave-taking on the part of the various friends and admirers. Photographs and trinkets were interchanged, and reference made to the extreme probability of their never meeting again, in case the whole force met with the disastrous fate of poor Hicks Pasha and his Column.

"These fellows of yours," said Allerton, "seemed better drilled than any other of the lot I've seen."

"They certainly have had rather more pipeclay," replied the Major. "Whether they would behave better than the rest of the breed, I can't tell. It seems hard we can't have a few more Bengal Cavalry Regiments down from India, where they're doing nothing in particular. They say the Royal Sussex has been ordered out, and the 46th. It's like everything we do —well done in the end; but half the money and 'the butcher's bill' might have been saved by tackling the thing at the right time."

. . . . . .

Once more upon the accustomed bosom of the ancient river. The placid water, the still, soft eve, the bronzed automata of boatmen; the red dawn, the glowing sunset, the starlight converse, the midnight reverie—all these familiar scenes and habitudes passed duly in order before the party of wayfarers as if they had been habituated to the same series of sensations from earliest youth.

"Oh, dear! I feel quite dismal and depressed," said Isabel, "after leaving that gay and festive Assouan. I wonder how many of those poor fellows who were so nice and attentive will be food for jackals before the summer is out? The Major told me they hadn't the least idea whether they were to stay where they were or be ordered on to Khartoum. He said they were getting awfully dull before we came, and hoped they'd be

ordered somewhere or else the Mahdi would hurry up and attack the town."

"Khartoum is a long way off," said Danvers. "Still, they could organise a flotilla of row boats, and send some part of the army across the desert. I am afraid fever will kill more than El Mahdi, if they get the route there."

"I have been told by men who have been there," said Allerton, "that a more miserable, filthy, unhealthy spot cannot be imagined. It is the capital of the Soudan Provinces, being situated in latitude 15°29′ on a point of land forming the angle between the White and Blue Nile at the junction. The town is composed of unburnt brick, and extends over a dead flat, occasionally flooded. Population about 30,000. Among these are French, Italians, Germans, Greeks, Armenians, Copts, Turks, Arabs and Egyptians."

"What an attractive sketch!" said Marguerite. "It seems familiar to me, curious to say, as a person I knew once and a great traveller, told me he had been there, and I recognise the description."

"What was his name?" said Isabel. "You seem to have had friends, Mrs. Mortimer, that have been everywhere."

"His name; oh! his name," said Marguerite hesitatingly. "Well, strange to say, his name was Gordon also; it seems quite a coincidence."

"It certainly is," said Isabel. "Oh! I suppose he was the traveller Captain Burton told us about. He is at home in England now, I suppose. He is well out of it all."

"I really hardly know," said Marguerite. "I believe he is in England. That is, he was when I last heard of him."

"And are there many troops there?" inquired Isabel. "Will there be enough to make a stand."

"In 1861 six thousand men were quartered there. Egyptian soldiers, blacks from Kordofan, a regiment of Arnaouts, and a battery of artillery. A savage and cruel soldiery, particularly the Arnaouts; but I suspect better troops to fight than the present lot."

"There was something picturesque about those

Arnaouts," said Isabel. "I always used to admire them in my childhood's stories."

"Eliot Warburton had seen a good many ruffians in his time, but he says they were quakers to the regiments of Arnaouts he saw at Korosko on their way to Kordofan or Sennaar, with orders not to return. It's a pity Hicks Pasha or Baker hadn't some of them. They could fight, at any rate."

"Yes," said Sir John Danvers. "'The wild Albanian, kilted to the knee,' had plenty of fight in him, although he had a playful way of shooting his officers for which the regiments used to be decimated by Mehemet Ali every now and then. Unfortunately for this state of matters, which would have exactly suited them, both they and the Mamelukes are absent—prematurely extirpated, as it would seem."

"Injustice is punished in the end," said Isabel. "If those splendid troops the Mamelukes, not to mention the Arnaouts, had been retained, these rebels would have had a different foe to meet. Fancy the Mameluke Beys charging the Mahdi's rabble! What a curious thing if the successor of the Viceroy which destroyed them should lose the Soudan, and perhaps a slice of Lower Egypt, for want of them! Though what is the good of the Soudan no one seems to know. Does it produce anything?"

"Gum arabic, and slaves," said Allerton. "The White Nile trade keeps it going in its living death, and that trade is ivory, which means kidnapping and murder. The Syrians, Turks, and Circassians, who engage in it, are perhaps the most awful scoundrels under the sun. Always excepting the few Europeans who are mixed up with them."

"And how do they set about stealing a mob of slaves?" said Isabel. "Just round them up and cut out what they want?"

"It is not so very unlike the simple Australian cattle camp practice," answered Allerton, smiling. "Only the commercial element is introduced. The slave dealer, having borrowed money at a hundred per cent., makes friends with the negro chiefs. He lays them on to a neighbouring village. Surrounding the unsuspecting

settlement, they fire the grass huts just before daylight, and pour volleys of musketry into the affrighted inhabitants. The men are chiefly shot down. The bewildered women and children are secured, along with the equally valuable cattle; then the women and children are fastened together with slave sticks and ropes, and—a living chain—marched to headquarters."

"If they escape they are followed, I suppose?"

"They are brutally flogged, or else shot as a warning to others. Landed within a few days' journey of Khartoum, where dealers and purchasers—chiefly Arabs—are ready to receive them, they are sent to the Red Sea ports—to Persia, Arabia, and even to Cairo."

"What hideous misery!" said Isabel. "I can't think who is worst and wickedest in the matter. Their own people sell them and traffic in their blood, but it seems the slave-dealers and agents are even worse. What a Providence Gordon must have appeared to these unfortunate creatures!"

"Yes; but, unluckily, of late he seems to have been abandoned. A man like him should have been backed up through thick and thin, through good and evil report, or what appeared like evil. No such mistake was ever made in the political history of these latter days as leaving Gordon to his fate."

"Did you ever see an Arnaout, Mr. Allerton?" said Isabel. "I suppose their dress was magnificent. They were chiefly Albanians, weren't they?"

"They were disbanded before my time, but I knew a man who had been an officer in an Arnaout Regiment, a reckless dare-devil even in his old age; he managed to get his discharge just as Mehemet Ali was about to send his troop to perish in Central African stations. They were chiefly Albanians, but the Pasha was not particular as to whom he enlisted, so long as they could fight. Their ranks, like the Zouaves', were full of the refugees and desperadoes of all nations."

"And what was their uniform?"

"No expense was spared in that. It was proved in many a bloody battle-field that they could fight, and were proverbially regardless of odds. Their locks were

worn long and flowing, covered with a red tarboosh, with a purple silk tassel; an embroidered jacket of scarlet or dark blue cloth; a full white kilt, reaching to the knee, embroidered gaiters and red slippers completed this picturesque costume. For arms a brace of pistols, and a dagger stuck in a silken sash round their bodies; a long silver-mounted gun slung at their backs, a curved sabre at their sides."

"What splendid creatures they must have looked," said Isabel. "What a pity they could not be properly disciplined."

"They frequently shot their officers, and elected others; but Mehemet Ali used to decimate them, and give them a more severe commander every time they did it, till they left off. They were so frequently complained of for lawlessness that at length they were sent away, confessedly to perish in the hopeless African stations."

Every one was somewhat depressed and passive after quitting the comparative gaiety and excitement of Assouan for the stillness and solitude of the river. It might be that the absence of the accustomed homage of the garrison told upon Isabel—that the danger and uncertainty of the desert route obtruded themselves painfully upon Mr. Baldhill and Allerton. Marguerite had relapsed into her usual state of dreamy indifference to all external objects and sensations. The only ones wholly unacted upon by the change of scene and occupation were their new friends, who appeared absolutely impervious to their altered circumstances, deeming apparently, in their acquired or affected stoicism, one set of persons and places much the same as another.

As it happened that neither of them had been to Thebes, the expectation of beholding those world-famous ruins raised even in their impassive temperaments a flicker of expectation and excitement.

As they passed Esneh they had the honour of another visit from their worthy old friend the Turkish Governor. He evidently had an idea that the end of the world was approaching. He deplored the inefficiency of the present rulers, and sighed for the good old days of Mehemet Ali, or Ibrahim Pasha, when these audacious

mutineers would have had a lesson read to them which would have destroyed the flavour of rebellion among them for many a year to come. He himself, he deplored, was powerless to protect them except in his immediate vicinity. But he counselled them to get back among their English friends as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, he afforded unequivocal proof that he had not lost his taste for brandy.

Gournou was reached at length, and the *Fatima* moored on the eastern river bank. It was thought wiser to leave Luxor and Karnak to the last. Mrs. Baldhill and Marie preferred to remain on board, but the rest of the party, having procured horses and an Arab guide, were soon riding fast over the level plain towards the temple of Ammon. A short mile from the river brought them to the Hall of Assembly of Ancient Thebes.

"Three thousand years ago," said Allerton, "these silent courts were thronged with eager crowds. Eloquence, party spirit, patriotism, ambition, were doubtless then represented. Where are the speakers, the listeners, the men of war or peace now? The wild flowers of the desert wave in the deserted halls. The wailing wind of the waste echoes through the silent portals."

Next in order came the tombs of the kings. Isabel was now in great spirits, Ibrahim having successfully cajoled the Sheik of the village into lending her his best horse. The day was fine and tolerably cool. The rich and fertile prospect and the cloudless sky combined to raise her drooping spirits. The corn waved around and across their path. Then they entered the gloomy mountain gorges through which the Theban monarchs passed to their tombs. A narrow path through boulders and cliffs of calcareous strata wound along the desolate, lifeless valley. After several miles of travel, the guide stopped at the foot of one of the precipices and proceeded to light his torches.

"Where are we going?" said Isabel; "I see no entrance. Is he to strike the rock, and will a door appear like that which the Fairy Peri Banou had leading to her palace?"

"It was Belzoni who discovered this aperture," said

Allerton. "He seems to have a wonderful turn for the sepulchre and mausoleum business."

The travellers descended by a steep path into the tomb, through a doorway covered with hieroglyphics, and entered an immensely long corridor that led for some hundreds of yards into the mountain. It was about twenty feet square, and painted throughout with great brilliancy of colour. Over each door were figures of a larger size—a winged globe, or a large scarabeus. The larger emblems—perhaps in allusion to the wanderings of the freed spirits—wore wings; globes, fishes, suns, all had wings.

One gorgeous passage made way for another more gorgeous still, until they arrived at a steep descent. At the base of this—four hundred feet from daylight—a doorway opened into a vaulted hall of noble proportions. Here the body of Osiris, the father of Rameses the Second, was laid, about 3,200 years ago, in the beautiful alabaster sarcophagus which Belzoni abstracted as the reward of his enterprise. He was said to have been offered £12,000 for it by the trustees of the British Museum.

"And what became of the royal mummy, poor thing?" said Isabel. "Was he undone for the amusement of staring London people?"

"I am afraid something of the kind did take place," said Sir John Danvers. "I saw it some years since in Sloane's Museum."

"Isn't the 'harpers' tomb' close by here?" said Isabel. "I want to see the two figures that so much has been said about."

This was reached after reasonable progress, and in one of the chambers of the main passage they saw the celebrated figures. The bodies are shapeless; but the bending arm seems to sweep the strings as gracefully in this lonely tomb as it may have done three thousand years ago.

A refreshing rest was necessary after the somewhat fatiguing journey. And on the following day the whole party agreed to remain at camp before entering upon the arduous exertion which the exploration of Luxor and Karnak demanded. Allerton had been there

before, and strongly urged, in spite of the probable uncertainty and danger of the desert route upon which they were about to enter, careful survey of these astonishing relics of the past glories of earth's oldest monarchies.

"Never again in this world," he said, with unwonted earnestness, "shall our eyes behold such an amazing spectacle. Never again is it possible that the labour resources of mankind can ever be applied with such concentration, or guided by the despotic power which is alone capable of producing such astonishing results. Tens of thousands of labourers, with the addition of skilled mechanics and instructed scientific architects, must have been utilised for decades and centuries even before such colossal edifices, such delicately finished statuary, such cities and temples and tombs could have been produced. It has been seen but once in the world's history. It is a spectacle that can never again be beheld in its pristine beauty, hardly perhaps in its wondrous age and decay."

"I never knew you had such a taste for ruins," said Isabel. "It takes an Australian properly to admire them, because we have none of our own. After all, we must wait till Omar returns, so we may as well be improving our minds as flapping away the flies on board the *Fatima*. But, talking of Omar, how does it happen that he and Ayesha are Christians, and how do the Abyssinians differ from the Soudan people? They all seem so mixed up—Arabs and Berbers, Copts and Egyptians, Fellahs and Turks—one's brain gets muddled."

"From what Ibrahim tells me," said Allerton, "our friend Akbar's sister, Leila, went on a visit to some of her relatives who lived near Khartoum, having probably made money by the slave trade, like other highly respectable Arab families. Here she met Omar's father, who was a rich and handsome young merchant—an Abyssinian Christian and a great favourite of the King, Johannes' father. It was the old story; they fell in love with one another, and made a runaway match, much to the indignation of the proud ebn-Moharrek. At length the feud was soldered up, but in course of

time Omar's father lost his money, and having been obliged to live in the interior provinces, fell a victim to a personal enemy and the conveniently comprehensive action of the slave trade. That was how Omar came to wear the slave-stick; and a most uncomfortable ornament it is, by all accounts."

"So his father had them brought up as Christians; but are the Abyssinians real Christians; and how did they come to be so?"

"This is what a man writes who knows his subject well:—'It is certain that, though the Crescent still holds its sway over the lower countries, the Cross resumed its empire in Abyssinia. There the faith which St. Mark preached in Alexandria was transplanted under the form of the Eutychian heresy; with the exception of a brief Roman Catholic interval, it has maintained its ground ever since. The light of Christianity glimmers faintly at present through this gloom of superstitions, which have the shadow of African idolatry added to their own. St. Michael is appealed to as an intercessor, and the Virgin Mary is deified almost to the exclusion of the Son. Confession is insisted upon as indispensable to eternal life, and those who die unshriven are refused burial. The King of Thou, Sela Selassi, is regarded as the lineal descendant of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. He calls himself "King of Israel," and bears upon his banner the inscription "The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed." The Abyssinians observe the Jewish Sabbath and several rites of that people, whose cause they deem themselves destined to espouse, believing that they shall one day rise *en masse* to deliver Palestine from the infidel. The Egyptians, proud of these converts to their faith, exaggerate the power and resources of Abyssinia and its Emperor as to his military forces, his command of gold, and his ability to withhold the waters of the Nile. In reality, the people are as savage almost in every respect as the natives that surround them.'"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE expedition to Luxor and Karnak was inaugurated with due pomp and circumstance, as the last bit of Nile travel that was likely to be enjoyed for many and many a day. In preparation for their Hegira across the desert, as Isabel insisted on calling it, nothing but the Arab steed would satisfy her aspirations. All the horses of any beauty or value in the adjoining village were requisitioned. A most imposing cavalcade careered across the plain of the Thebaid as day broke, for they had determined to commence by beholding the statue of Memnon at sunrise, so as to verify the well-known legend of his vocal power at the first beam of the sun.

Allerton and Isabel rode at the head of the party, immediately behind the Arab guide, her horse, a noble bay with a star, being the handsomest of the whole troop. She rode Eastern fashion, with wide Turkish trousers ; a shawl which fell evenly on either side from her waist gave the outward semblance of the ordinary English riding-habit. Behind them came the Honourable Bertie with Marguerite, who handled her grey Arab in a way which excited the admiration of her companion.

Mr. Baldhill and Sir John brought up the rear, neither Mrs. Baldhill nor Marie being minded to increase their acquaintance with ruins ; the former lady having acquired, she averred, a sufficient knowledge of temples and tombs generally to last her for the remainder of her life. "The next thing I want to see, my dear," she confided to Marguerite, "is a well-built two-storey house, and my room with a four-post bedstead and mosquito curtains. That's what I look forward to now, and value above all the ruins in the world."

"Here are the two gigantic statues of the Kings, Tama and Chama," said Allerton, as they reined up before the colossi, about twenty yards apart. "Sitting alone amid this wide sea of verdure, they keep watch

over the mysteries of the past. 'There they sit,' says Miss Martineau, 'hands on knees, gazing straight forward, seeming to be looking over to the monumental piles on the other side of the river, which became gorgeous temples after these throne-seats were placed there—the most immovable thrones that have ever been established on this earth.'"

"And which is Memnon?" said Isabel.

"The northerly one. He has been greatly knocked about either by Cambyses, the old ruffian, or as Strabo reports, and the Prophet Ezekiel foretold, by an earthquake; 'No shall be rent asunder.'"

"The sun will rise in five minutes over the Arabian mountains," said Isabel. "Now we shall know whether 'a sweet melancholy cadence like an Æolian harp' will issue from him. Keble says:—

> 'Soft as Memnon's harp at morning
> Touched with light by heavenly warning.'

The Greeks called it Memnon's welcome to his mother, Aurora."

The fated moment referred to in chronicle of dimmest eld was about to arrive. All sat silently on their horses, expectant, almost solemn. In a second the golden rim of the sun's globe was raised as by an invisible hand slowly over the far purple range. All looked to the grim, solemn giant; then shouted aloud in irrepressible reaction from their previous calm. "But there was no voice, nor any that answered."

"The oracles are dumb," said Allerton. "The priests in old days may have arranged matters more successfully—or possibly the sound may have been due to purely natural mechanism."

"I feel disappointed," said Isabel; "after all our early rising too! But I suppose after going on for three thousand years or so the poor thing got discouraged. Besides, his chest seems to have gone, and to have been built up."

"He fell down in 70 B.C., and had to be built up altogether," said Allerton. "It is said there were eighteen similar statues, which extended to the palace

of Ammon. In time of inundation they must have had an imposing appearance, standing fifty feet above the ordinary level as they do. The pedestals are seven feet deep in the sand. Memnon's arm measures seventeen feet nine inches from the elbow to the hand; from the knee to the foot nineteen feet eight inches. The foot is nearly ten feet long, as indeed a certain size would be necessary for his support."

"As we are not likely to hear anything from Memnon," said Isabel, "we must bid farewell to him, and had better make the best of our time in looking over this said plain of Thebes, the hundred-gated. Who was it said that?"

"Homer, if I mistake not, speaks of—

> 'Royal Thebes—
> Egyptian treasure-house of boundless wealth,
> That boasts her hundred gates, through each of which
> With horse and car two hundred warriors march,'"

said Allerton. "It seems curious to think that this place was populous, wealthy, and celebrated a thousand years before the Greeks assembled in siege before the walls of Troy."

An early breakfast—a "chotah hazree," as the Indian travellers called it—had been partaken of before they left their encampment. The sun was high when they had partially explored the Thebaid and were in a manner surfeited with avenues of ram-headed gods, of sphinxes, miles of columns, acres of temples. At Luxor they had wandered through the labyrinth of immense courts magnificently decorated—the innumerable pillars that everywhere reared their richly-carved capitals; the superb colonnades that surround the courts, presenting forms of grandeur before which all human architecture except Karnak dwarfs into insignificance. Columns lay strewn about in such profusion that Aladdin's Genii might have despaired of creating them, yet they measured six-and-thirty feet in circumference, and gleamed, like a cathedral's painted window, with every colour of the rainbow, bright and vivid as if the sun shone through them.

They had wandered through the hall of the Memnonium, as the palace and temple of Sesostris is called. Within it was the library. The ceiling is covered with astronomical figures, which make the date of the building 1322 B.C. A statue of Sesostris lies without the temple, in the position which he has occupied since Cambyses overthrew him. The upper part of his body is broken into vast fragments. The breadth of the enormous figure across the chest is twenty-three feet. The whole was cut from one single block of granite, and polished like marble.

Care had been taken to arrange that luncheon should await them when they had finished their morning's work. Ibrahim had sent a couple of the Arab boatmen with a laden camel and a guide, who, expectant of backsheesh, managed to hit upon a very suitable place for their symposium.

A moderate-sized, but beautifully ornate hypæthral temple, dedicated to one of the numerous family of "Pashts" or sacred cats, made a tempting dining-room —the smooth granite slabs of the floor; the massive walls between them and the sloping sun-rays; the overhanging date-palms, which waved and rustled to the faint, fitful breeze; the picketed horses, which "a man clad in a flowing garb did watch the while"—all these purely Arabic adjuncts of easternry made a picture which the travellers long remembered.

"What a most wavishing place faw ah picnic," said the Honourable, stretching himself luxuriously upon a rug which had formed part of the camel garniture. "Heah one has evewything to gwatify the most epicuwean taste. Society in the midst of solitude, palaces in pwofusion, cold game pie, and—ah—bittah beah."

This last indispensable fluid, so grateful to the British palate in all lands, had been supplied by the speaker and his comrade, it being the only thing, thanks to a most liberal supply at Cairo, that they had not run out of when they joined forces with Mr. Baldhill.

"We are looking our last, I suppose," said Marguerite, "upon these 'kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them.' All in the past tense, as it seems they are, I shall always be thankful for having had the

privilege of seeing them before I die. No amount of imagination could have presented them to one's mind."

"Nothing like them in the world, I suppose," said Danvers, "and certainly nothing will ever be constructed like them again. One can almost imagine that they were the work of pre-Adamite giants. However did these weeds of Egyptians move blocks weighing hundreds of tons in so many different ways?"

"They may have had mechanical advantages that we know nothing of," said Allerton. "Did you notice the broken statue in the Ramesseion? It must have weighed nearly 900 tons. It is made from Syene granite, and now lies hundreds of miles from its pristine quarry."

"Things that no fellah can undahstand," said the Honourable Bertie. "I give it up. Must wead up on shipboard. Feah I'm painfully ignowant of ancient Egypt."

"We shall all know enough about it when we get to Kosseir," said Isabel. "I feel as if I had lived here all my life. Except Lady Duff Gordon and one or two others, I shall give way to no one on the Nile question generally. I wonder how much longer we shall have to wait for news of Omar and his party?" she continued. "We had better devote to-morrow to Karnak, and who knows whether we may have much more time? It is one of those things in this world that rarely come twice."

"All things considered, we have done a pretty good day's work," said Allerton. "I vote that we ride quietly home and prepare for a full, final, and complete exploration to-morrow. I suppose the Sheik will lend us the horses again. We shall need a little practice for the Hegira."

"I must say there is something very nice about an Arab horse," said Isabel. "They are so sympathetic. I won't give in that our horses in Australia, the thoroughbred ones, I mean, are not as good as any in the whole world; but still, these are great pets, and there is a wonderful elasticity about them."

"If you get back safe to Merradoolah you may pose as an Eastern traveller to any extent," said Allerton.

"While you are about it, you ought to take a dromedary or two. A favourite 'delul' would create a sensation on the Myall Plains. You could easily ship them at Kosseir, and so on to Aden."

"If I thought you were laughing at me," said Isabel, with pretended anger, "I would make dad turn back and go right down the Nile to Cairo again and spoil everything. But you cannot be so lost to all decent feeling."

"I am afraid you are becoming too Eastern in your feelings, Miss Baldhill, and can't stand contradiction or mild chaff. As you kindly admit, I was not laughing at you, but as a friend perhaps I may be allowed to hint that we mustn't overdo this Eastern business."

On their return Mrs. Baldhill was unaffectedly surprised that they were so anxious to spend another day in exploring ruins; as if they had not had enough of it. Mr. Baldhill, too, was not enthusiastic. "I'm just about full of this ruin racket," he said; "poking about day after day among these temples and tombs and pillars. I don't see anything in 'em now more than a lot of stockyard posts. It seems to me as if half the living in those days must have been working for the dead, and the other half making all safe with the priests for the time when they wanted tombing. It suited them, I suppose, but it's not in my line; and this week, I hope, sees the end of it, unless we're going to take up country and sit down in Egypt for good."

"Don't be cross, daddy," said his daughter, nestling up against him, and pressing her soft face against his weather-beaten countenance. "We shall never see anything like this again till we go to Heaven; remember Mr. Stanhope and Sir John haven't seen it before, so we are going to have one very grand day—only one—and then we'll make ready for this Kosseir march, so as to be off directly Omar comes."

"Well, you can go, pussy; I shall stop at home with mother and Marry. There will be enough of you without us."

"All right, dad; Mrs. Mortimer wants to go too. She's getting younger every day. I never thought she

could ride as she does, but she's one of those people that can do everything."

"As long at she keeps you straight, pussy, and manages to knock what she's paid for into your pretty little head, she may have all the riding and driving and exploring she's a mind to."

Once more the glowing Eastern morn, the free fast ride through a wide plain covered with coarse grass, varied by gloomy lakes and the yellow-haired acacia. At the end of an hour, the guide reined in his horse and pointed southward with his spear. There lay Karnak, darkening the whole horizon with a world of portals, pyramids, and palaces. They entered beneath a lofty portal eighty feet high and two hundred in width, a long avenue of sphinxes, their heads broken off; but the rest of the body had remained unmoved, the guide said, since the days of Joseph, or the Sheikh Yussuf.

"What a sight this must have been in the palmy days of Thebes!" said Allerton. "An avenue of two hundred enormous statues, terminated by that temple. Yet this is only one of many. There are at least seven others, with similar porticoes and archways leading from this stupendous edifice. We ride through half a mile of sphinxes before we get to the temple, the splendour of which no words can describe."

"Are we never to come to the end of these marvels?" said Isabel. "No wonder there were descriptions of enchanted palaces, pre-Adamite Sultans, and stupendous architecture in the *Arabian Nights* romance. The writer must have copied these, or heard the traditions of Arabs about these palaces of the waste. But we lose time talking. What a dead world is here!"

A glorious portal opened into a vast court crowded with a perfect forest of magnificent columns, thirty-six feet in circumference, covered with hieroglyphs and surmounted by capitals all of different patterns and richly painted. There were about one hundred and fifty, though authorities differ. The central ones measured about sixty-six feet in height, exclusive of the pedestals and abacus. The temple altogether was one mile and three-quarters in circumference, with walls eighty feet high and twenty-five feet thick.

Silent with astonishment, and almost with awe, they rode through labyrinths of courts, cloisters, and chambers, only dismounting where masses of masonry had fallen in. The fairy beauty of the obelisks particularly arrested their attention. The eye at times could hardly follow the tapering shaft until at length it seemed to lose itself in the dazzling sunlight.

"Here let us rest and have our lunch," said Isabel, at length dismounting and seating herself upon one of the paws of a partially dismantled sphinx, close by a wonderful propylon, eighty feet high, and covered with most delicately-carved hieroglyphs. "I see old Hassan, the camel-driver, ever so far off. Somebody guide him over here. I want to sketch that palm-tree and the obelisk beside it. How I shall miss my temples to be sure! And to think that this is our last day!"

"We must make the most of it," said Allerton. "We shall none of us be inclined to forget it."

Hassan was telegraphed for, and within reasonable time the meats and wines of the infidel were spread under the shadow of the palace of that dread King before whom piles of human heads were displayed at his coronation like so many loaves.

"Strange what a modern quality mercy is, when one comes to think," said Allerton. "Conquest, or even moderately secure rule, was always cemented with the blood of the vanquished, and torture was freely employed to give a zest to the triumph and the victory."

"Wouldn't have missed this view, these picnics, this delicious mixtchah of the modern and the antique, for a golden cwown," said the Honourable Bertie. "Would you, Mrs. Mortimah? I feel a wisah and a bettah man, I assuah you."

"I don't know that I should go quite so far," said Marguerite; "but this memory will abide with me during my whole life, and be put away among my treasures. Whatever comes, we have seen that to which earth holds no parallel."

"Didn't some one say that the Nile at one time took a different course?" queried Sir John. "From the appearance of some of the temples one would not think

they were intentionally placed on the very bank, almost underneath."

"Quite true," said Allerton. "Palgrave says that within historical memory the Nile, instead of flowing West of Luxor and Karnak, thus separating one half of ancient Thebes from the other, followed a more easterly course under the mountains by the Red Sea, leaving the Lybian Plain wide and unbroken. Indeed, it is said to have adopted its present course only two centuries ago. It is now ploughing the mid-level at random among the ruins, undermining some, lifting up others; it will probably sweep a few clean away—Luxor, for example."

"It is disappointing to think that this most ancient river should be variable and inconstant," said Isabel. "It is only the sphinxes that are immutable, and that is due to their feminine nature. There are sphinxes and sphinxes too. I have discovered one close by here with a most sweet and gentle expression of countenance."

"If we stayed here long enough we should make wonderful discoveries, I doubt not," said Allerton; "but we must make the best of our way home so as to begin to-morrow to put everything in order for the overland route. There are still a few last looks to be taken before we leave this paradise of sculptors. It is a pity we had not brought one with us."

"We should never have got him away again," said Isabel. "Never mind, an Australian genius, nurtured amid 'round stuff' and stringy bark slabs, will come here for inspiration and astonish the world. The old lands are evidently 'played out,' as Americans say. The future destiny of earth will rest with new nations. The older nations appear to have consisted, with the exception of Greece and Rome, of a few individuals of note and a herd of slaves or peasants. Such, no doubt, was the constitution of these realms when tens of thousands of the inhabitants worked at these magnificent but chiefly useless edifices."

"I suppose it is only in free and Christian nations that the individual can be fully developed," said Marguerite; "the laws that secure the freedom of the

humblest citizen provide for the gradual elevation of the whole population."

"Very gradual, I am afraid," said Isabel, "if we may judge from some of our people; but now tell me, is the tomb unknown of Pharaoh who oppressed the Jews?"

"Well, the *savans* tell us," Allerton replied, "that the tombs of the Theban Pharaoh who resigned in right of his wife, Taosiry, and of the Jews' Pharaoh are well known. In the former the King appears as man and spirit—in his past and present. In the latter the wide extent of his dominions is indicated by five lines of tribute-bearers—black, red, light and dark brown, yellow—offering gifts of ivory, apes, leopards, skins, gold, &c."

"And did you see the tombs of the Kings when you were here before?"

"Yes, Sinclair was mad about sepulchres, so we did the tombs religiously. You must know the old Egyptian Kings set about furnishing their tombs directly they began to reign. Being of a semi-divine nature (as they believed), it was incumbent on them to provide carefully for their befitting passage to another state of existence. So among the Libyan Hills in the sacred solitude of the mountains, we ascended in search of the royal sepulchres."

"It must have been a weird and sombre expedition," said Marguerite, listening eagerly.

"It was inexpressibly mournful and unearthly. We climbed the first of two gorges—the very ideal of desolation—before and behind, on either side, rocks utterly denuded of vegetation. This was the last retiring place of the Theban Kings, and a scene of more unrelieved horror cannot be imagined."

"Did you go into the chambers of the dead?"

"We entered a sculptured portal in the very face of the wild dark precipice, and found ourselves in a long, lofty corridor, narrowing into successive halls covered with a hard white stucco—this stucco with colours as vivid now as they were thousands of years ago. Forty-seven tombs were known by the ancients in the time of Diodorus, twenty-one have been discovered by modern

explorers; but only three are complete and perfect as when they received their royal occupants. Some were more magnificent than others, being most gorgeous palaces, hewn out of the solid rock and richly embellished. Here, truly, 'all the kings lie in glory, every one in his own house,' from the eighteenth to the twenty-first dynasty."

"What a wonderful and strange idea," said Isabel, "this solitude and splendour of funeral custom!"

"It was important," continued Allerton, "you see, that the body should remain uncorrupted. When Osiris awakened the King from his long sleep, his soul rejoined his body at that moment, and entered upon a career of unbounded happiness with his immortal ancestors. The tomb also where he was enshrined was necessarily concealed from profane eyes or disturbing touch."

"That is the reason, I suppose, why the sculptures on the tombs," said Marguerite, "reproduce as far as possible the details of human life, so that the King, on awakening, might see around him the familiar objects."

"Exactly; and the farther we advanced into the great tomb, the more deeply we became involved in continuous processions of jackal-headed gods and monstrous forms of good and evil; the goddess of Justice, with her single ostrich feather; barges carrying mummies across the sacred lake; more than all, incessant convolutions of serpents in every form and attitude—human-legged," he added, "crowned—entwining mummies, enwreathing or embracing processions. At length we reached the vaulted chamber where lay the immense granite sarcophagus which once contained the body of the King. Here the processions attained their climax, meandering in all directions, in white and black, red and blue, legs, arms, and wings spreading over roof and walls in enormous and fantastic forms, like the phantasmagoria of a dream."

"It must have seemed like one of de Quincey's opium visions," said Marguerite. "You would be thankful and relieved to get to upper air."

"I feel quite sorry we are not to see them," said Isabel. "That is the worst of being pushed for time.

One ought to stay for a year or more in these places, once one does come."

"I vote we establish ourselves at Assouan, under the ægis of Britannia and wait for the *finale*," said Sir John Danvers. "It seems a shame to go away while Gordon's fate lies trembling in the balance."

"If it was not for mother, I really would stay," said Isabel, with an air of prosaic calculation of chances. "I could persuade dad, I know; but it will be the death of her, I know, poor dear, if she doesn't get back to Sydney and the South Head Road within a reasonable time. She has exhausted her interest in foreign travel, and I would not for worlds run the risk of her health."

"I fear it can't be done just at present," said Allerton; "but, as Mr. Baldhill says, if the price of wool keeps up, there is no reason why we shouldn't return. Other people, ladies too, manage to pay more than one visit. But the day is closing fast. *Andiamo!*"

"We are leaving, perhaps for ever, the splendours of the Old World," sighed Isabel, "for the rude architecture and vulgar comfort of the New. I wonder how we shall relish the contrast?"

"There are compensations," said Allerton; "but it is something to have seen 'the utmost display of funereal grandeur which has ever possessed the human mind—the whole religion of Egypt unfolded as it appeared to the greatest powers of Egypt at their most solemn period.' We have explored that mysterious valley, and our lives will be richer to the latest day for the experience."

"For all that we have seen," said Isabel, "I should have thought our journey incomplete without this. I now feel nearly satisfied and cheerful and sanguine about the future. Farewell, Thebes! beautiful by nature and art! I shall see in memory's magic mirror the wide green plain, river-encircled and mountain-guarded; the long avenue of sphinxes, the shadowy palm, the giant gateways. Glimpses of these things will mingle with my reveries, and blend with my dreams. It is a vision that has been stamped on my brain, and will leave its impress there for ever."

. . . . .

As they reined their steeds by the shore of the great river, in the crimson shadows of the evening, they were conscious of an unusual stir among the village population. As Ibrahim and the elders approached with respectful salaams and complimentary expressions to take their horses, it was evident something important had occurred. The intelligence was soon conveyed by Ibrahim. Omar had returned, and, with his following, was encamped on the river meadow.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ISABEL could hardly sleep for thinking of the "army with banners" which awaited her review in the morning.

With the first light she was dressed. After a hurried cup of coffee, she compelled her father to go with her towards the strip of irrigated land where the "ghazu" was encamped. But quick eyes had espied them. They had not gone above half the distance, and could see the rows of horses picketed and the black tents upon the level verdant oasis, when a mounted Arab dashed forward at full speed, and pulling up his horse, delivered this message. "He had been ordered by Omar Bey, the servant of the Bahadoor of the Inglesi, to report that the troop of horse under the command of his cousin, Abdallah-ebn-Moharrek, would march to the camp in full array with proper and respectful ceremony later in the morning."

"Oh, dear!" said Isabel; "how provoking! I wanted so particularly to see my horses, if they had come, and now I shall be consumed with anxiety for the next two hours."

"Told you we had better stop and get our breakfasts like Christians, pussy!" said Mr. Baldhill. "These Eastern fellows don't like to be hurried, and Omar wants to show off a little bit, of course."

"And when shall we be able to start?" said Isabel, poutingly. "We can't wait a week, surely?"

"A week!" said her father, in amazement. "I see nothing to prevent us from getting away to-morrow, or the day after; I am always for a short journey rather than none at all the first day."

"What do you say to camp on the Plain of Thebaid, as they call it here, daddy, the first night?" inquired Isabel, insinuatingly. "It will just do for an afternoon start."

"Anything and anywhere rather than stay an hour longer in this hole of a place," said her father. "If you knew how sick and tired your mother and I are of the whole thing!"

"It's nearly as bad as going to school and taking you with me, poor old dad," said she, coaxingly. "Never mind, it's not much worse than going to balls with me, and you'll have to do that some day."

There was then nothing for them but to wend their way back to the dahabieh. There they found everybody up, and breakfast about to be served, a proceeding which afforded Mr. Baldhill a lively satisfaction.

"So our army has arrived at last," said Allerton. "Omar the faithful has proved himself so far a good investment. When we sight the Red Sea we shall be better qualified to judge. Meanwhile the Guard of Honour appears to be well armed, well mounted, and altogether an efficient contingent."

"Did you see my horses?" said Isabel, eagerly. "I am dying to know what they are like. Of course he has brought them?"

"We had not a close view," said Allerton; "but we thought we saw a negro riding one horse and leading another, which might possibly be your precious steeds."

"Oh! how perfectly delightful!" said she, clapping her hands. "I suppose I can ride one when we start to-morrow. I daresay he will be beautifully trained, and quite a luxury to sit upon. I must get a jereed, and learn to do 'fantasia.' I don't see why I shouldn't play at it like other Arabs. I am going to be an Arab girl till we get on board our steamer. After that, I must play Miss Propriety again, I suppose."

"Once we get on board a Christian ship, Isabella," said Mrs. Baldhill, "I do hope you will put all this

Egyptian rubbish out of your head. I am afraid if we stayed much longer in this hot, nasty place you would lose all the benefit of your education; and to think of what it cost your poor papa! Indeed, only for Mrs. Mortimer, you would have gone back terribly. But mind now, Bella, no more Egyptian nonsense once we get among decent people again."

"I don't see why a 'fellah' should give up Egyptian," said the girl, with a look of mock seriousness. "That's not a bad *mot*; is it, Mr. Allerton? I feel myself a 'fellah' all over, I assure you, hating the Turks, dreading the conscription, and yet with a bad feeling towards England, which protects us from both."

"Everything is geographical," answered Allerton, philosophically. "No doubt if we stayed here long enough we should change into either Turks or Arabs, slaves or slave-dealers. Happily for all, we seem likely to make a move at last."

Breakfast was long concluded, and Isabel's resources for passing the time exhausted, Mrs. Mortimer's words —she was reading aloud—being heard without corresponding ideas resulting, when a change became visible in the vicinity of the cavalry quarters. The "shrill horn of Afric" awoke the air with sudden blast, and with stir of plume and pennon, jingling of spurs and bridle-chains, and lifted lances, the Children of the Desert formed into column and came swiftly towards them.

"There appear to be more than I expected of them," said Allerton, as rank after rank formed in line, and swept up at full speed, but wonderfully in order, towards the point of land where the *Fatima* was moored. "I can't quite make it out. Either Omar has met with some ready-made force out on the war-path and has annexed them, or I misunderstood egregiously the number of free companions we mentioned to Akbar."

"Never mind! The more the merrier," almost shouted Isabel, in high glee. "Oh! how splendid they look! When I am mounted on 'My beautiful, my beautiful, that standest meekly by'—I don't know what I am going to call her—I shall feel like Zenobia and

Semiramis, or 'some o' thae folk,' as the old Scotch-woman said."

And now, to the intense joy and admiration of the possible Queen of the East, the body of wild horsemen advanced with a half-circular sweep, and checked their steeds so as to march past her and her companions with due military pomp and circumstance.

At the head of the troop, side by side with a young Arab of noble appearance and haughty bearing, rode Omar. But how changed, how transformed, from the scarred, sullen, despairing captive upon whom Isabel's gaze had fallen in the slave mart!

Richly, not to say gorgeously, dressed in Arab vestments of the best fashion; mounted on a high-caste charger, with sword and pistols, and the long gun which the Bedaween chiefly value, Omar seemed the incarnation of the chivalry of the desert. Probably judicious use of the bag of piastres furnished by Mr. Baldhill had contributed to this astonishing alteration. His whole bearing and expression seemed changed. His large dark eyes beamed with pride and courageous confidence, as behind himself and his kinsman came the troop, in number about three hundred, swarthy and grim of aspect, but evidently a well-disciplined band, well armed, and mounted upon horses of exceptional condition and quality. Their hawk-like countenances, their carefully kept arms, their long lances, their easy horsemanship, powerfully impressed the English party, particularly Isabel, who could hardly restrain herself from uttering exclamations of delight.

The whole troop at the word of command defiled before the party, lowering arms, and making a salute as they passed. After the march past they proceeded at a slow pace to their encampment, while Omar, springing from his horse, prostrated himself at the feet of Isabel.

"Lo!" he said, "Omar the slave, but trusted by his mistress and the Bahadoor, whose word is fate, and whose riches are exhaustless as the mercy of his heart, has returned, through God's help, to his duty. I present humbly to your acceptance as the Bey of your soldiers, my kinsman, the Sheikh Abdallah-ebn-

Moharrek, whom, with his followers I encountered in a lucky hour. They have a 'ghazu' in hand of their own; but in obedience to Akbar, who is the chief of their house, and to pay honour to the English Khanum and the Bahadoor, they will engage to escort them safely to Kosseir, though the desert were thronged with robbers and infidels. Have I spoken the truth, O Abdallah, friend of my soul?"

Here the young Arab, who had also dismounted, advanced and bowed low before Isabel, and, being interpreted by Ibrahim, said a few modest words. "He felt honoured in being chosen by Allah to guard the beauteous lady and the merciful Bahadoor to the shores of the Red Sea. They had sworn an oath to Akbar, the great Sheikh of their house, to die in her defence, man by man, before evil should happen to one of the party."

"Tell him," said Mr. Baldhill, "that he has spoken well, and that I will make him a suitable present when we reach Kosseir."

"And tell him," said Isabel, who had no idea of being excluded from the conference, "that I trusted Omar, and that I trust him. I admire his gallant troop of horsemen, and feel sure they will protect us from all the dangers of the desert."

The swarthy cheek of the young Arab glowed and his eye flashed as he shook his lance and said, with an accent of deep feeling, "Not a man among them will ever enter the tents of the ebn-Moharrek again who has not seen their ship bearing the noble strangers sail safely from Kosseir. On my head be it!"

At this moment a negro, nicely dressed, and with a silver collar round his neck, but evidently considering himself a person of importance, rode slowly forward, mounted on one horse of great beauty and leading another. Isabel could not help clapping her hands. "Oh, look at this dear white horse! What an angel he is! What an exquisite head, and how proudly he carries himself! I must kiss him. The other is the sweetest creature, and brought by a black slave with a scarlet turban too! It is too exciting and delicious; just like the *Arabian Nights*, isn't it, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Suppose we hear what Omar, or rather his friend, has to say," said Marguerite. "He looks astonished at your demonstrations of joy."

"Never mind that. I can't help it. He's going to tell us all about them."

"Akbar-ebn-Moharrek," said the young Arab, "sends greeting to the lady of the Inglesi who has showered blessings upon the children of his blood, having rescued them from captivity. She deigned to express a wish to possess two steeds of pure race. They are here. Behold the slave Gholab—also a gift to the Khanum." He waved his hand to the negro, who took the bridles of the docile animals, and placing them in Isabel's hand, prostrated himself at her feet. "This lady has but to wish, and the ebn-Moharrek will execute her commands, even as the Djinns and Afreets obeyed Suleiman-ebn-Daood."

"Oh! what a glorious creature!" cried Isabel, stroking the smooth crest and silken mane of the magnificent white horse, the larger of the pair. "Ask him his name and race."

"May Allah preserve me in my need," said the young Arab, with a serious and devout air; "but this is Zohrab, a white Seglawi-Jedran horse, whose blood can be traced back to the four mares of the Prophet. His pedigree is written on the scroll which is enclosed in the bag suspended to the saddle-bow, and likewise that of Zuleika, the dark bay Kehilan mare, having a star, token of good fortune, on her forehead. Both are in their prime, they are known for speed, courage, and endurance throughout all the tribes with whom the ebn-Moharrek have dealt in peace or war. They will serve to recall the desert to the lady of the English in a far land."

"Tell Akbar for me," said Isabel, "that I shall remember him, and you, too, as long as I live, as friends and brothers—men of truth and valour. Zohrab and Zuleika shall be cherished all their lives, and never go out of our family."

"Their blood has been in ours for five hundred years," said Abdallah, with a proud yet grateful smile. "Nor has one of the race ever been sold or parted

from, save in friendship or war. But they go to a place of honour, and we are content."

At a sign the negro resumed the bridles, and stood in the attitude of one ready for the next command, while Omar and his friend, after a few words to Ibrahim, made the requisite obeisance, and rode slowly back to their encampment.

"Omar will return presently and receive your commands," said Ibrahim to Mr. Baldhill. "The guard will be ready to start to-morrow at whatever hour you may appoint. The slave Gholab and the horses are now the property of the Khanum, and will henceforth be subject to her commands."

"Then let them be taken down near the boat," said Isabel. "I won't trust them out of my sight in future. I'll ride Zohrab this afternoon. Mrs. Mortimer, I'll make over Zuleika to you for the journey. I'm sure she's as easy as a sofa. They're sure to be quiet."

In the afternoon accordingly a riding party was organised, consisting of Mr. Baldhill and Allerton, with Isabel and Marguerite. The rest of the party were busily employed in packing up and making a careful disposition of what was to be sold, taken on, or left behind. Sir John Danvers and Mr. Stanhope had been lucky enough to find a couple of travellers who had come in from Sennaar, and who were so burnt up and spent with heat and dust that they pined for the Nile travel and the plash of water once more. They had no difficulty in disposing of their dahabieh to them, with the whole outfit and whatever they elected to leave behind. This simplified the troublesome matter of a "change of gauge" wonderfully.

Mr. Baldhill had also settled his affair after a fashion peculiar to himself by presenting Ibrahim with the *Fatima* and all that it contained, less what they required for their sojourn in the desert.

"It wasn't worth bothering about," he observed, with his customary free-handed manner of looking at things. "Ibrahim was a capital fellow, and had done everything in a way that had saved them no end of trouble and anxiety. He believed in paying a good

man well, and if he got a few hundred pounds for the boat, it was nothing more than he had earned."

The rest of the party fully endorsed this sentiment, and Allerton in his own mind, knowing the wide circulation which would be given to this act of liberality, deemed it might turn out to be even diplomatically prudent, though no thought of such a notion, he was sure, had crossed his friend's brain.

When the grey horse Zohrab was led up by the turbaned attendant, with a scarlet saddle-cloth, a Mameluke bit, and other Eastern accoutrements and adornments, he certainly looked the most splendid charger that any maiden ever had in the world. His beautifully-shaped head and large, intelligent eye; his arching, crested neck; his muscular, oblique shoulders; his clean, flat legs and hoofs like hammered iron; his glossy, satin coat—all these traits and points stamped him as one of the long-descended aristocrats of the equine race—a true child of the desert—a comrade of warriors and hunters since the days of their ancestor, Ishmael.

Before they had moved a dozen paces, Isabel shook her reins lightly, and the gracefully-fleet courser bounded off at a deliciously easy, deer-like pace, which the impatient damsel quickened to a hand-gallop, even for a short distance to racing speed.

"Oh, charming, heavenly, intoxicating!" she cried out, as the perfectly-trained, even-tempered palfrey moderated his gallop gradually, without the slightest shock or jar, relapsing into a walk.

"I never rode any horse so elastic, so beautifully free and fast, yet obedient, before," said the excited girl. "You only need make a sign, and he knows what you mean. He sympathises instinctively. I feel like the Knight of the Leopard, in the *Talisman*, when the Saracen Emir starts off with him and the two high-bred mares distance the cavalry of the Crusaders. It is the next thing to wings. Don't you think so, Mrs. Mortimer?" said she to Marguerite, who just then came up; having, with Mr. Baldhill, followed at a more moderate, though sufficiently fast, pace. "How does Zuleika carry you?"

"She is charming!" said Marguerite, patting her horse's neck. "I never felt anything so delightfully easy, gentle, and swift. I am equal to any amount of desert travel on her."

"You shall have her all the time," said Isabel. "You appreciate a good horse. This one is a pearl—a 'Mootee,' as the Arabs say; but I must not change his name, or there is no saying what may happen. Horses' names and pedigrees are serious matters in this part of the world. How glad I am we did not go up the Nile and disappoint Omar and Abdallah. I should never have forgiven myself."

"Wait till we're all aboard a P. and O. steamer before you're quite sure of that, pussy," said Mr. Baldhill. "It's a wild bit of country across to Kosseir; isn't it, Allerton?"

"It was an old overland route from Keneh once," said he, "and regularly followed by all classes of travellers. But it has been long disused, and I have no idea what it is like. However, two days and a half ought to do it, at the outside."

"Why, the English Government might run a railway across without much expense," said Mr. Baldhill. "It would save no end of bother, and come in handy just now, in more ways than one."

"It is not at all a bad idea," said Allerton. "By improving the port and putting up warehouses, Kosseir might recover its ancient prosperity, and become a great emporium, as Berenia, not so far off, used to be. A line of steamers might be established between it and Suakim, which would be the terminus of the Soudan railway."

"Splendid," said Isabel; "I must put that in my book; we can pose as pioneers and prospectors; perhaps the Australian share-market will take it up; I'll invest, if dad will let me, because it will help to put down the Soudan slave-trade; but this is our last ride near Thebes; let us make the best of it."

The stars were up, and the weird shadows of distant pylons and temple masses, "clear against the crimson rim" of the horizon, were deepening as they rode into camp, where Gholab, in attitude of deep humility, awaited them. He had looked slightly troubled as he watched

the party come sweeping in at half-speed, which Isabel, who was leading, did not feel inclined to moderate. "I can't find it in my heart to pull him up," she said; "the sensation is so truly delicious, but I suppose with my weight there's no fear of over-riding him? Ask Gholab."

That responsible official, being appealed to, replied that either Zohrab or Zuleika might be galloped fifty miles without stopping, and then fifty miles after that, without fear of injury. They were true "wind-drinkers," and had never been known to fail in war or peace.

"Now I shall always feel comfortable," said Isabel, dismounting. "I'm not hard-hearted, but I like to think that my horse can do something out of the common when I want him."

The evening meal was of an unusually cheerful, not to say festive, description. Messrs. Stanhope and Danvers had completed their negotiations with their compatriots, and delivered over their boat and its contents without hitch or disagreement. Having brought up their arms, including Sir John's famous repeating rifle, and all their personal belongings, they were in high spirits at being perfectly free and unfettered for new adventure. Mrs. Baldhill and Marie had finished, with Ibrahim's assistance—who was steeped in gratitude at Mr. Baldhill's generosity—their more arduous and responsible task of packing. So peace and satisfaction reigned.

Omar had also during the afternoon informed them that Abdallah and his troop would be ready to attend them, and to commence the journey to-morrow. As doubtless there would be some slight delay in the first packing of the baggage-camels and other matters inseparable from their departure, it was proposed to encamp by a ruined aqueduct on the Karnak Plain the first night. On the day following they would reach, if Allah permitted, the half-way stage to Kosseir. The next evening would disclose the waters of the historic sea.

This was good news, and cheering to the soul of Mr. Baldhill, who was secretly chafing at the delay. The Englishmen were full of anticipation of the novelty of desert travel, with the further excitement of the *terra Australis incognita* thrown in. Isabel could talk of

little save Zohrab and Zuleika, which she said were worth coming to the desert to obtain, if for nothing else. She felt supremely happy, and at peace with all the world, except El Mahdi and the slave-dealers.

"Those dear horses have even put that hero-prince, Gordon, out of my head," she suddenly exclaimed. "Has any fresh news been heard about him?"

"Two Berber camel-drivers came in yesterday, who have been employed as spies," said Sir John. "They report that he made a sortie and routed a strong body of El Mahdi's troops. One can't say, of course, how true it is."

"Wegulah welief expedition with flotillah of boats up the Nile nearly weady to embark," said the Honourable. "Heah Lord Wolseley's to take command. Going to do the thing wespectably at last."

"Oh, joyful news!" said Isabel. "Pray Heaven they won't be too late. What a pity we can't stay and go up with them! I should like to see Sir Garnet, too. I can never think of him as Lord Wolseley."

"It will be a deal too late if you don't go to bed," said Mrs. Baldhill, interposing at this juncture. "There's a lot to be done to-morrow, and I'm that tired I can hardly keep my eyes open. Good night, Sir John. Good night, everybody."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE sun rose as usual on that most eventful morning, though to Isabel's excited brain it would hardly have appeared inconsistent with the ordinary course of nature if Rameses had appeared in person to bar their passage through his ruined realm. But long before the first beams of the day-god gleamed on the ancient river and fallen fanes, the encampment was astir; the sound of voices, of trampling steeds, of hurrying feet, proclaimed that preparations for the march had fully and earnestly begun.

Before mid-day, in spite of certain delays and miscalculations, common to all expeditions soever, whether of peace or war, Omar and Abdallah were riding in front of their troop, with their faces towards the historic sea, followed at a short distance by their Frankish employers and friends. Behind them came the baggage camels and their attendants, superintended by Ibrahim, who had, with a few of the village notables, begged to be allowed to accompany the Bahadoor on the first day's journey.

Omar had taken care to bring a sufficiency of spare horses for the rest of the party, so that they were suitably mounted, though none could boast of coursers for one moment to be compared to that "bright, particular star," Zohrab. He excited general admiration as he arched his neck and trod the deserts with free, elastic step beneath Isabel's graceful, swaying form. Mr. Baldhill's mount was, perhaps, the next in value, being a muscular, compact, and, for an Arab, full-sized chestnut. He was noted for extreme surefootedness (as Omar informed the party), a point upon which Mr. Baldhill set great store, and was capable of performing the longest day's journey without diminution of speed or freshness.

"Just the nag I should have picked for a stock-horse twenty years ago," said that gentleman, as he gained his saddle with practised ease, though not with the agility of an earlier day. "Well up in the shoulder, though he's a trifle hog-necked. Wonderful legs and feet, and a back rib like a cask. He'd carry me from here to Merradoolah, flying, if we could only ride there overland."

Mrs. Baldhill, who, like most Australian ladies, had in her youth been accustomed to coursers of various sorts and conditions and so acquired the almost instinctive knowledge of the art of equitation which rarely comes with later training, expressed her satisfaction with the docile, easy-paced animals which had been allotted to her and Marie. Omar explained that either of them could be ridden with a halter, if the Khanum and the Frangi lady found the Mameluke bridles troublesome. But to this Mrs. Baldhill objected.

"I've ridden pretty fast down-hill before now," she said, "in old days with nothing but a gunny bag to sit sideways on, and a green-hide leg-rope round our old pony's nose; but that was when I was young and lissome. A bridle's a bridle, even with the quietest horse, and there's nothing like being safe when you're getting on in years."

As for Marie's charger, she seemed to have divined the inexperienced character of her rider before many minutes, and attaching herself to Mrs Baldhill's steed, followed that lady's course without reference to Marie's opinions or suggestions.

"Oh, isn't this glorious!" said Isabel, as she watched the long line of spear-men, holding their course as directly as a bird's flight across the apparently illimitable desert—the far horizon but faintly darkened by the outline of the vast ruins which, with the following day, they would quit for ever. "It is worth a year, a whole year of life. I would cheerfully make the exchange if Mephistopheles was here in person to propose the bargain."

"It is fine in its way, but of the nature of fleeting enjoyments," said Allerton, who rode on her right hand. "You would soon tire of the discomfort, and find even some prosaic annoyances, were this state of things continued."

"I can hardly think so," said the excited damsel. "War and gallant adventure, of which our little army is an emblem, have always brought out the noblest traits of humanity. I wonder if there is any likelihood of a real fight? Not for anybody to be killed, but I should like to see a real charge or two. These lances would look so splendid lowered, and this troop going at full speed at another about the same size. How I used to admire that battle in *Marmion*! No one ever wrote a description, I am sure, which came so near to the actual thing.

> 'Where bill-men deal the ghastly blow,
> And charging knights like whirlwinds go.'

Fancy a whole line of knights in full armour too! We

are living too late in the world's history for any romance."

"I wouldn't say that," said Sir John Danvers. "When Bertie and I were in India last year, we saw one of those Rajah fellows with such a bodyguard of cavalry—a thousand men, all in chain mail and splendidly mounted. It was quite a mediæval reminder; wasn't it, Bertie?"

"Elephant in the pwocession with £20,000 worth of jewels on his person," affirmed the Honourable Bertie. "Ranee of Jhansi, too, no end of a Wajpoot Queen, wode at the head of her own twoops. Cut down fellah one day, they say, for mutiny. Wegulah Semiwamis, give you my word."

"I shouldn't like that," said Isabel, with an expression of pain. "But the men in the chain mail must have been splendid."

The first night's halt had been arranged to be upon the plain of the Thebaid, as affording conveniences of water and forage in the long coarse grass which at the locality covered it. They had travelled at a leisurely pace, as befitted the commencement of a journey. Yet the sun was an hour high as they moved into camp, upon a knoll near a vast hall, of which the pylon, hardly showing a trace of decay, reared itself to a height of nearly a hundred feet above the sands.

At a short distance the troop found a fitting position for their encampment, and the picketed horses were soon deep in the enjoyment of the barley, which had been brought from the village on camels for their use. This was another specimen of Mr. Baldhill's liberality, for on learning from Omar that they would have to trust entirely to the natural herbage and edible shrubs on their journey, he at once offered to lay in a store of grain.

"Grass-fed horses are all very well in their way, and many's the thousand mile I've ridden on them," he said; "but there's nothing like a little corn if there's anything extra to be done. We don't know what's before us yet."

So the horses had their forage provided for a morning and evening feed; and the heart of every man in the

troop warmed to Mr. Baldhill, as a man learned about horses, and who treated them with proper consideration.

"May the shoulder of his horse never fail him in flight or in battle," said a grizzled Bedawee, guarding his charger—who had displayed a strong inclination to eat his neighbour, and to kick the ribs in of the animal behind him—with extreme watchfulness. "Verily the Prophet spoke truth, 'He who gives grain to a good steed shall have a year's earlier entrance to Paradise.' The Frankish Sheikh is a sultan for generosity, and we will fight for him, if need be, like Rustum and Antar."

"We shall carry our sabres unsheathed to the borders of the Red Sea; is it not so, Achmet?" said a slight young Arab who was lounging near. "What is the use of talking about Rustum and Antar. I wonder if half the tales about them are true?"

"May Allah shield us from unbelief," said the veteran. "Are not their names in the Koran? But I heard, ere we quitted Hail, that the Tuarek Bedaween—may their black faces be scorched by Eblis—were ready to join El Mahdi, and would plunder all caravans and travellers that did not carry his protection."

"But they are far enough away from this line," said the young Arab, with a graver inflection in his voice as he spoke. "Neither are their numbers great."

"Togrul Bey can muster five hundred spears," answered the senior. "When there is plunder in the case he would not think much of riding three hundred miles in three days and nights. Some one may tell him that the Bahadoor travels with a bag of gold, and we know he has an old blood feud with Abdallah since he killed his sister's son."

"It is a coffee-divan story," retorted the young Arab. "But why not tell it to Abdallah, or to Omar of Khartoum, who rides on his right hand?"

"He knows it all, and more," said the old Bedawee, sententiously. "But do you, Selim-ebn-Saood, keep your horse in good wind, and your arms ready. Allah knows what is to be. For my part a cloud of dust may turn itself into armed men before we sight the warehouses of Kosseir."

"May the grave of Togrul's father be defiled—Kodereeyah that he is!" said the young Arab, impetuously. "Before he touches one of the Bahadoor's party, there will be one of the ebn-Saoods the less. I swear it, by the black stone of Kasba!'

It is possible if this conversation had been overheard by Mr. Baldhill, that everybody would not have been so joyous and utterly contented with life in general as were all the members of that little party under the great pylon.

After the evening meal, as the moon rose slowly over the sea-like level of the desert plain, Isabel, whose spirits and energies no amount of exercise could lower, proposed a ramble through the ruins. The moon-rays bathed the mysterious masses of masonry with a flood of silver light, as with grave or sportive converse the travellers paced terrace and corridor, mausoleum and vestibule, with lingering footsteps. They grouped themselves shudderingly in the vast and shadowy halls; they heard the owl hoot in the King's Chamber, and saw the wild-goat leap from the altars of a forgotten priesthood. The night was far spent when they returned to their tents, and Mrs. Baldhill was disposed to be condemnatory as to the imprudence of curtailing the hours of sleep when a long day's travel awaited them on the morrow.

"We shall have plenty of time to sleep when we get to the steamer," said Isabel. "People do nothing but eat and drink, sleep or flirt, on board ship, that I ever saw. Depend upon it, mother, we're more profitably employed in storing up memories of these mighty relics of the past, than in anything we're likely to do for the next six months."

"I can't say for that," said the old lady. "I hope it will be an improvement on the last year. But unless you intend to sleep on your saddle you'd better go to bed now."

Mr. Baldhill had impressed upon Omar, through Ibrahim, that as they were to do a long day's stage on the following day, a very early start was a matter of necessity. He also subjected him to a rigorous examination as to the character of the route—whether there was

water; whether they would halt at mid-day; or make the whole day's journey without a stoppage.

"We shall halt at the fountains of Zobeydah," said Omar. "It is a good stage for the camels; but they will start at midnight, and be there as soon as the troop. It is a walled fountain. Blessings on the gracious Queen who had it constructed. We can await the evening there, and go as far as the palms of Johan before the moon rises."

"And when must we be ready to start?"

"Abdallah and his horsemen will form rank ere the stars pale in the sky," said Omar. "It will be prudent not to be separated from them. It is never safe to trust the desert too far."

"We shall be ready?" said Mr. Baldhill. "It will be 'boot and saddle' before the Southern Cross turns round—if we were in Australia, that is—you may trust me for not sleeping on my watch."

The promise was kept. The dawn had not tinged the pale-hued Orient; the deep, intense lustre of the stars, which burned away in that cloudless azure, was undimmed, as the band of horsemen, like a ghostly array of warriors from some forgotten battle-field, moved silently forward. The Europeans were not quite so soundless, and indulged in their usual mirthful badinage as they followed in the rear, at a moderate distance from their escort.

The stage was long, the track faint but followed with unerring fidelity by the hawk-eyed scouts, who rode on either side at the head of the troop through the breezeless sand ridges. In spite of the excellence of their horses and the novelty of the whole affair, the unwonted exercise beneath the pitiless sun-rays commenced to tell upon the more inexperienced travellers. Marguerite and Marie were terribly fatigued. Mrs. Baldhill complained audibly of the heat, the dust, the flies, and the unreasonable distance of the stage; while Sir John and the Honourable Bertie averred that if eastern land travel were no better fun than this, they would confine themselves to the Nile and P. and O. service in all future wanderings. As for Mr. Baldhill and Allerton, long experience of every discomfort which could arise

under such circumstances had rendered them impervious to ordinary inconveniences. Isabel appeared to have inherited a similar immunity. They addressed themselves to the task of raising the spirits of their fellow travellers, and luring their minds to the contemplation of the rest and ease which awaited them at the fountain of Zobeydah.

"Think of the delight of cool water and shade, and a carpet to lie down on, mother—a real delicious lunch, too. Such nice things that went with the camels last night. I feel the most terrific appetite already. Mrs. Mortimer, I hope you won't be really fatigued when we stop to-night—only decently tired, so that the night's rest will recover you."

"I was almost fainting coming through those terrible airless hollows," said Marguerite; "I really thought I should have fallen off Zuleika, though I struggled hard against the feeling. But I am stronger again now. If we could see the walls that surround this pearl of the desert, this fountain of the generous Zobeydah, I should feel quite restored again."

"I believe I really do see something," said Isabel, bending a keen, searching glance towards the horizon. "Yes, there it is; a low line of wall and four towers, one at each corner. Hurrah! I must go and tell dad. I believe Mr. Stanhope will be as glad as any of us at the news."

It was so indeed. The prospect of speedy relief, though of a temporary nature, from their troubles, had the effect of raising the spirits and restoring the energies of the party. The pace was quickened, a new expression of grateful anticipation brightened every face, and when they reined up before the mass of heavy masonry with which the benevolence of the dead sultana had surrounded the priceless waters, and saw the camels lying down or browsing contentedly near the entrance gate, all feelings but those of relief or satisfaction were effectually banished.

The ladies of the party were assisted to alight, and conducted through the massive gate into the interior of the enclosure. Allerton then betook himself to organise the commissariat, and found to his great satisfaction

that their attendants had already made the necessary arrangements for a comfortable repast, having had abundant leisure for the operation. Despatching them with instructions to spread the carpets under the shade of the massive walls and a solitary palm tree, he sought Mr. Baldhill, who was regarding their escort with unusual interest.

"It looks queer, doesn't it," he said, "that they don't seem to care about dismounting. Omar and Abdallah and a few of the head men are jabbering away, but no sign of going to camp. They were here before us, too. I don't fancy the look of it."

The appearance of the leaders had also, in Allerton's eyes, something uncommon. They were engaged in earnest conversation. There was no sign of the breaking up of ranks which so quickly follows a halt, especially after a fatiguing stage. The order to dismount had not been given. The men sat patiently upon their horses, which, by champing and an occasional movement, betrayed impatience.

"They are all looking one way, too," continued Mr. Baldhill. "Surely to God there's no danger of any of these robbers of the Mahdi's dropping across us here?" And the cheek of the hardy explorer paled as he thought of his wife and child, and the terrible hazards of Eastern warfare.

"Pray Heaven there be nothing of the sort!" said Allerton, fervently. "But they have all the air of men at sea with a strange sail in sight. I saw something like a cloud myself a minute ago, and it certainly looks more distinct now and larger too."

"I was mad to risk this journey," said his companion in a tone of bitter repentance. "I might have known the chances were against us. But luckily we have a larger escort than I calculated on, and these fellows will fight well, or I am mistaken in them. God alone can help us, and we must do the best we can for ourselves."

"I'll walk over and see Omar quietly," said Allerton. "You had better go back to the ladies. See that they have their lunch comfortably; they will want all the support it may give them. Danvers and Stanhope are

with them. Keep them there till I return. You may trust me to tell you exactly what our chances are."

"All right, Bruce," said his friend. "We know one another of old. There's no use getting flurried, and these chaps, even if they're the wrong sort, can't be here for a good spell yet."

When Allerton joined the little group, which consisted of Omar, Abdallah, and a few of what might be called the non-commissioned officers of the troop, Omar addressed him, pointing to the far cloud on the horizon, which even in the short time which had elapsed, had sensibly increased in size, and which now began to assume an appearance as of moving dust.

"Does the Bey of the Inglesi see that?" said he.

"I see a cloud," said Allerton, "also dust. Perhaps it may be only a whirlwind or a sand pillar. We have often seen them before."

"The dust comes from the hoofs of the horses of Togrul Bey, a leader of the Tuarek Bedaween, a robber and a seller of blood," said Omar, solemnly; "unless the best eyes in the troop are deceived. He has led a 'ghazu' across this track, hundreds of miles from his usual beat. He expects to find a rich booty. He has perhaps heard from his spies of the rich Bahadoor. He will fight hard before he gives up the prize."

"But there is nothing much to be got from us," said Allerton, affecting an indifference which he hardly felt. "A few good horses and camels, our rifles, and a bag of piastres—little of any consequence."

"You know not Togrul Bey," said Omar, sadly. "He is the most remorseless of his robber tribe. The Tuareks are celebrated all over Northern Arabia for cruelty and greed. This mongrel Kodereeyah—he is as black as Gholab, nearly—is capable of holding you all for ransom in a cruel captivity, and of every outrage if he is disappointed of his price."

"We must fight him to the last drop of our blood then," said Allerton. "After all, Abdallah's force is well armed and well mounted. They appear to be picked men. There is no fear of them not doing their duty to the utmost."

"Wait till you see them charge," said Omar, with

raised head and flashing eye. "Mark them now, each man has dismounted, and stands by his horse. He has nothing to eat, but a mouthful or two of dried corn; a little water they will get in the fountain. When Togrul Bey comes near enough, they will mount at the word, and then you will see how the ebn-Moharrek can fight for the friends they have sworn to protect."

"I believe they will," said Allerton. "All the same, I wish we were well out of it. And will they have no food but what I have seen; the horses none either?"

"The Bedawee is accustomed to pass days and nights in the saddle and to fast until the time comes when he can enjoy himself without fear of interruption. He cares nothing for a divided pleasure, or for filling himself one hour and fighting the next, like you Franks."

"And the horses, will they taste nothing?"

"A little water they may have—just sufficient to wet their lips—but no more. The Arab never feeds his horse but in morning and evening. A high-mettled horse of pure race can go for twelve or fourteen hours without food, and only improves on the journey. You will see these horses, when the signal for battle is given, and the Tuareks are ranked before them."

"I must speak to Abdallah," said Allerton. "Bring him here."

"It is plain from what Omar has told me that we are in great danger," he said to Abdallah. "If this be Togrul Bey's 'ghazu,' and it is larger than yours, we may be taken prisoners and cast into captivity. I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but it is best and necessary to speak plainly."

"It is the will of Allah that I should fight hand to hand this day with the evil djinn of my tribe, the destroyer of my race," said Abdallah, in a tone of such concentrated hatred and wrath that the young Englishman stared at him. "But his fated day has come. Our numbers are not less than three-fourths of his approaching troop; their doom is sealed."

"That is well, Abdallah; but as sensible men, let us arrange the plan of the battle first. We must not leave more to chance than we can help. How do you

propose to form when they come up? They are getting rapidly nearer."

"Hearken unto me, O Bey! Are not your two rich Inglesi friends unerring marksmen? Have they not guns which can kill like Heaven's lightning at ten times the distance of ordinary ones?"

"It is true, O Abdallah! Their aim is sure as the finger of Azrael. They can load and fire as fast as the hail falls upon the mountains in winter."

"That is well. To Allah be the praise! Let them be posted with the camels, the Khanum, and the other ladies behind the walls of the Zobeydah. We will draw up at no great distance from them. As the Tuarek charge, we will wheel to either side. Let them aim at Togrul Bey and his sons. Him they may know by his scarlet turban, a suit of chain mail, and a necklace of gold, which he wears round his neck. The young men are also richly dressed. We will wheel in and charge like all the demons of Eblis as soon as the volley is fired. We will defend the gate till the last man of us is down. Before a man of Togrul's troop drinks of the water of the fountain our band will be no more. Here is my hand! Be strong of heart, and trust in Allah. Something tells me we shall drive them before us like chaff before the wind."

"So may it be. I must now inform my friends," said Allerton.

He ordered the camel-drivers to take their patient beasts within the enclosure, and then proceeded to the extremely unwelcome task of informing the party of the state of imminent peril in which they would find themselves in a comparatively short space of time. Mr. Baldhill's expression of countenance was troubled and anxious, but the remainder of the party, thoroughly rested from their fatigue and recruited by the well-earned meal, seemed in higher spirits and by no means cast down by the announcement.

"I feel sure you have come to tell us something of importance," said Marguerite, in a low voice, fixing her eyes upon him. "And it is not good news either, unless I mistake your expression. You had better let us know the worst at once."

"It is only this," said Allerton, raising his voice; "that a body of horsemen are approaching; there is doubt as to whether they are friends or enemies."

Marie turned pale, and shrieked aloud. Mrs. Baldhill uttered two words—"My child!" The Englishmen neither spoke nor changed colour. Then Mr. Stanhope said, in his ordinary dulcet accents, "Jack, old man, I think I observed my field-glass with you. Most miwaculous wange it has. Miles upon miles. Twouble you to hand it ovah."

Danvers proceeded to hunt for the desired instrument, which being produced, was handed to his friend, after which he busied himself in examining his rifle, which apparently was in perfect order and condition. He then extracted a plethoric bag of cartridges from his handbag, and proceeded to stow away a large number of them in a cunningly-constructed belt around his person.

The Honourable Bertie, meanwhile, had quickly mounted upon one of the walls of the enclosure, and was busy scanning the still distant dust-cloud, with a careful and painstaking air.

"So our battle has come at last, and perhaps more realism than will be comfortable," said Isabel, looking up at Allerton with an expression of high resolve. "Is it quite certain that the strangers are hostile, and if so, what is our chance of victory?"

"Suppose we ask Stanhope what he can make out from them. We had better expect a fight, in case of the worst. What do you see?"

"Large twoop of horse, savage-looking lot, armed to the teeth, coming on at a gallop. Horses wather exhausted, I should say. Saw sevewal stop and fall out of wank."

So delivering himself, the Honourable Bertie slowly descended from his watch-tower and joined them.

"Tell us all about it, Allerton," said he. "We saw you having a confewence with Abdallah. Is he eagah for the fway; and are those wespectable Awab parties of his likely to be steady under fire?"

"I think I can answer for them. They are a game, resolute-looking lot, and will stand the steel. They

have a private grudge against Togrul Bey, if it turns out to be that particular scoundrel. I told Omar besides to promise them fifty piastres each from Mr. Baldhill and myself when we reach Kosseir."

"Quite right; happy thought! Danvers and I will make it up to a hundred; and for that pwincely donation the Awabs of the pewiod ought to fight to the death and an hour or two afterwards. What part of the play is entwusted to us?"

"Our party, with the baggage camels, is to be entrenched inside this masonry. We are to do the sharpshooting and rifle practice generally. Great results are anticipated from Danvers' repeating rifle."

"I'll back Jack to make a sensational score," said the Honourable; "he's the coolest hand, and he laid in a pwime stock of cartwidges to my certain knowledge; he'll make it hot for Togrul of Tuawek, or whatever his wespectable name in full may be."

"Then Abdallah and his men are to have all the fighting in the open," said Isabel, in a disappointed tone of voice, "while we are to be stuck behind stone walls out of harm's way, ingloriously taking sitting shots at the Tuarek?"

"Afwaid there's nothing else faw it," replied the Honourable, as if he were anxiously casting about for some means of permitting Isabel to go to the front. 'Discwetion aw—bettah part of val-ah,' Shakespeah, you know. Must considah Mrs. Baldhill's feelings."

"Well, I call it mean," said Isabel, "to look on while men are shedding their best blood for you, and not be able to risk a scratched finger to help them. But we shall have a good view of Abdallah's first charge. If Marie was not such a nervous little goose, she might sketch it roughly, her figures are wonderfully good."

"All this will be quite in place afterwards, when we are on board ship again. At present may I suggest to you, Isabel, to go and comfort your mother, who naturally will feel this bloodshed and danger very deeply. For my part, I think we shall make a good fight of it. These fellows will be pretty well done when they do come up. Omar thinks they may have come a hundred and fifty miles without a halt. They expected,

no doubt, to find a smaller party. Our men and horses are in first-rate condition, sound in wind and limb. If I were a betting man I would take odds that we see their backs within two hours."

"I hope they won't run too soon," said Isabel; "I have set my heart upon being slightly wounded if there is a real engagement. I am sure darling Zohrab would be as steady as a rock under fire."

CHAPTER XXXVI

In a comparatively short space of time the advancing body of horsemen was visible to the naked eye. So far as could be judged from their loose and irregular array, they were a hundred or two more in number than the band of Abdallah. They came on at a headlong gallop, and seemed bent upon charging right up to the gate of the fountain. They approached nearer and yet more near. Then it became apparent that an extraordinary forced march had been made. It had been the intention of Togrul Bey to swoop down suddenly upon the group of Franjis, as the Arabs would call them, who, his spies had informed him, were about to travel from Keneh to Kosseir. Rich, defenceless, infidels, and strangers, they were in his estimation a valuable and an easy prize. If furnished with an escort, it would be of such moderate size that a full-sized "ghazu," such as he now led, would be able to ride over it. He had heard that the Wells of the Sultana would be their mid-day halt. Since sunset of the preceding day his troop had ridden an almost incredible distance, in order to make a surprise at this point. Now that it was actually in sight, the fierce falcon of the desert had not been able to control his eagerness. Thus, without going through the form of halting before his enemy, in order to bring his disordered ranks into line, he had ridden straight on.

The effect of this rashness was to prevent him from duly estimating the number of Abdallah's troop. Close-

ranked and concentrated in square, they appeared fewer than they really were. They could see, however, the Europeans, and the baggage camels in the enclosure, and from the smallness of their numbers, despised them as antagonists.

The situation now became intensely exciting—even dramatic. The crowd of wild horsemen brandishing their lances, shouting their war-cry, swinging at times their long guns above their heads, came sweeping on. They were near enough for their faces and general equipment to be distinguished. Swarthy, savage countenances, with black elf-locks, thrown into stronger relief by their white haicks, their long Arab "jibbehs" floating behind them. Yells and cries came at first faintly; then clearer as the distance lessened. Many a mile had the high-couraged horses come since dawn. Perhaps even this was the second day in which they had hardly ceased that long, regular gallop. Their drawn flanks and wide-blown nostrils showed the distress under which many of them had been going, perhaps for hours. None, however, showed fatigue in the way those of less pure blood would have exhibited it. None slackened pace; none faltered. Those whose strength was unequal to the strain either stopped dead or fell like logs, utterly devoid of sense or motion. Several in this form raised their mute protest against the unsparing barbarity of the march.

"Seems as if he'd winded some of his nags," said Mr. Baldhill. "They look to me like a mob of wild horses I once met coming in to water on the lower Lachlan. They hadn't had a drink for best part of a week. I saw the leader stagger, and one old mare drop in her tracks, like that fellow's horse that went down last. He ain't moved yet. I've a notion Abdallah's chaps'll knock saucepans out of 'em when it comes to the charge. That barley I found 'll put double life in our lot."

"Not to mention the piastres which the men are to have at Kosseir," said Allerton. "Our fellows will stand to pull that off if they can. Love goes first with an Arab, war next, and money third."

"Like enough," assented Mr. Baldhill. "But I wish

it was over and done with. I wonder if we can spot that Tuggeral, or whatever they call him. It puts me in mind of Tuggerah Bay at Illawarra. They're coming close now. It's time for Abdallah to shape."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Baldhill and Marie, with Isabel and Marguerite, were disposed of in safety behind the solid angles of masonry, where nothing, humanly speaking, could reach them. Between the enemy and the outer gate, Abdallah's band was drawn up, patiently awaiting their hereditary foemen. Sir John Danvers and Mr. Stanhope had picked out for themselves a "coign of vantage" where they could aim with certainty, as they considered, and whence they could not be easily dislodged, unless the Tuareks had it all their own way. Mr. Baldhill and Allerton, at an opposite angle, also commanding the gate approach, were lying flat upon the wide wall, nearly protected by one of the towers, and apparently as calm as if they were duck-shooting.

In spite of all Mr. Baldhill's injunctions and admonitions, Isabel had climbed up some projections of the rude masonry, and gained a position where she could view the advancing foe. She had persuaded Marguerite, who was also unwilling to be debarred from all personal knowledge of the combat, to follow her example. Only portions of their heads were exposed, and these, from the great height of the walls, could scarcely be seen from below.

"Oh! how grand, and yet terrible," said Isabel, as with hands clasped together they stood side by side on the rude parapet, with a bird's-eye view of the advancing host, "I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Mr. Kinglake ought to be here. No one else could do it justice. Look at those wild horsemen with their eyes glaring and their teeth fixed. I call it sublime."

"I can't quite enter into your feelings, my dear Isabel," said Marguerite, "when I think of our possible fate; not that I have not every hope of our safety. But it is altogether too awful a danger to be calmly criticised. It is like philosophising in a shipwreck."

"I believe I *am* a little like Mr. Midshipman Easy," averred Isabel, "for I can argue and analyse under all circumstances. And, after all, why should it be taken

for granted that we women of the present day have no courage? Many of the wives and daughters of the Crusaders accompanied them, and into this very country, too. Think of what they must have 'had to put up with,' as people say. They had to find courage, and plenty of it. Oh! look, Mrs. Mortimer; that must be Togrul Bey himself. What a horrid-looking wretch, and what a grand horse—nearly as handsome as Zohrab."

"Our troop is wheeling into line now," said Marguerite. "And I suppose Togrul Bey, if that be he, is rallying his men. He looks more like a negro than an Arab, certainly. His gold collar and coat of mail render him easy to pick out. He is talking to two dark young men, his sons, I suppose, and now they have partly halted in order to charge with more effect. Oh! my dear child—may God preserve and shield us this day."

"Amen," said the girl, reverently. "We are in His hands. May He show the right, as the knights used to say, and now—oh, look, how splendidly our troop has wheeled into line opposite the gate, waiting for Togrul to charge. Here they come! What a frightful tumult!"

At that moment an overwhelming din, partly made up of the small brass kettle-drums which are used in Arab warfare, and of shrill blasts of horns, but mainly of every kind of yell and shriek which could come from the human throat, arose in the air, as with lifted lance, brandished sword, and levelled gun, the wild, fantastic crowd of strange riders charged furiously at Abdallah's band.

"Look at Omar, how proudly he rides in the front rank," said Isabel. "I declare he means to rival Abdallah, who has won his spurs in many a hard-fought battle, they say. Ah! now he has given the word to charge."

There was a moment of breathless anxiety, as the two bodies of mounted men approached each other. Even the unpractised spectators could discern the difference in calibre between the well-fed, well-accoutred steeds of Abdallah—of his trained, disciplined troops—and the disorderly half-tamed rabble of Togrul Bey.

In another moment the opposing bodies would have hurled themselves upon one another—when, like lightning flash, the front ranks of Abdallah's band swerved right and left, thus permitting the enemy to continue their course towards the gate of the fountain. This sudden manœuvre surprised and partially discomposed them. Suspecting an ambush, they drew up somewhat irresolutely, as if to fully comprehend the meaning of the movement. At that moment, the simultaneous fire of the concealed party told with murderous effect. Not a bullet was wasted, and from their breech-loading arms they were enabled to keep up an almost continuous fire, while the sixteen shots which Sir John's repeating rifle was able to send forth consecutively almost doubled the effective strength of the riflemen. More than a score of saddles were emptied. One of the sons of Togrul Bey dropped dead from his horse, and the redoubtable chief himself was severely wounded. A certain amount of confusion was created.

At that moment, above all the din of battle, of the groans of dying men, and the strange, sharp cry of wounded horses, Abdallah's charging shout was heard. Like one man the troop, which had drawn off upon the flanks, now converged, and with irresistible force and "elan" dashed full into the ranks of the disordered foe. Their impetuosity was so great, their steadiness so marked, that the desert band, faint with long fasting, and mounted upon horses which had been taxed to their utmost strength, were outmatched. They commenced to give way, at first fighting desperately and doggedly, but after a while with less vigour and determination.

But the Arab warrior dies hard. Secure of finding himself in Paradise (according to the promise of the Prophet), he who rides to his death in the front of the battle feels neither fear nor uncertainty. If victorious, there are prizes and plunder, glory and repose; if unsuccessful, Heaven holds forth no higher rank, no choicer pleasures, than for the believer who falls amid lance-thrusts and sabre-sweep to rise no more.

Hence, although with every charge the horsemen of Abdallah—who drew off again and again to ride

triumphantly through the thinned ranks of their opponents—became more confident, and had each time an easier task in slaying and utterly routing their foes, a desperate hand-to-hand conflict was kept up by the group of veterans around their leader that still preferred death to dishonour.

Togrul Bey himself, though wounded in several places, showed that ferocious courage and dexterity in the use of his arms which had gained for him in his youth pre-eminence among the rude freebooters of the Tuarek and the Bishareen. In the varying fortunes of the fight, it chanced at length that he and Abdallah came within a short distance of each other. Abdallah rode straight at Togrul, who had just cut down one of his best men; yelling as he came, "Turn, robber of the Tuarek, murderer of women and children, who hast not courage to bare thy breast to the Arab spear like other men. Turn, and face Abdallah-ebn-Moharrek."

"You shall sup with Eblis this night—companion of Giaours that you are," growled the robber, his dark face looking more demoniac than ever from the blood which streamed from a cut on his brow. "You are come to atone for the blood of Husseyn."

A hand-to-hand combat ensued, which almost divided interest with the real issue of the battle. A sufficient number of the adherents of each leader were at hand to keep the general fighting going, and to prevent unfair interruption. Isabel and Marguerite watched with absorbing interest from the wall, as first one champion and then the other obtained a temporary advantage.

"What a splendid swordsman Abdallah is," said Isabel. "His yataghan seems to be in all places at once; but that chain-mail protects Togrul, I can see. He is so strong, too; I quite tremble for Abdallah. Ah! that thrust," and here she gave a loud shriek. "He's down; I fear he is killed."

Scrambling from the wall, Isabel rushed across the enclosed space and placed herself as near to the outer gateway as she could, near which the concluding part of the battle was raging. Allerton, who had been firing steadily in company with Mr. Baldhill, at this

moment quitted his side and joined Isabel. "Oh! can nothing be done?" said she. "Look, he has fallen close to the gateway. He is right under the horses' feet. Could you not drag him in?"

"I will try at all hazards," he said. With this he made a rush from the portal, and seizing the fallen man, from whom the tide of battle had now fallen away, lifted him up, and proceeded to half-drag, half-carry him towards the entrance. Pale was Abdallah's cheek, and heavy the lifeless body which, with the blood flowing fast from a dangerous-looking wound in the side, had all the appearance of a corpse.

As he struggled along, encumbered with his burden a mortally wounded Arab rose to his knees, and seizing a spear which lay beside him, plunged it into Allerton's side. Unaware of a concealed foe, Allerton had used no precautions, and fell an easy victim to the treacherous assailant. The Tuarek dragged himself along on his wounded limb. The dying wretch was evidently bent upon making certain of the death of the Franji, whom he had so craftily brought to earth. But the Australian girl, now roused to the highest point of excitement, was not minded to behold her helpless friend and countryman done to death before her eyes. "Assassin," she shouted, as dashing out of the gateway she possessed herself of one of the short maces used in Arab warfare which lay scattered about. She made straight for the ruthless savage, who, with a ghastly grin, compounded of pain and deadly hate, was about to finish his work. He raised his spear, and but for her activity might have transfixed that fair and fearless bosom; but, bounding on one side, she struck him fairly between the eyes, so shrewd a blow that he sank motionless backward, at the same time that his dangerous weapon passed through the fleshy part of her right arm.

"You're out of it for the present, my friend," she remarked. "For two pins I'd give you another; but as you're down, I'll forgive you. Help me, Mrs. Mortimer, and we'll carry in both of these poor fellows."

Marguerite had not been able to restrain herself when she saw the fall of Allerton, and now stood by Isabel's

side. Allerton was first carried in, bleeding freely from a wound which promised to be dangerous, if not fatal. Then Mr. Baldhill appeared upon the scene, and helped to bring in Abdallah, who was still unconscious.

By this time the conflict had lost its character of a contested fight, and settled into that of an absolute defeat, culminating in a rout. The principal portion of the band, headed by Omar, pursued the broken remnants of Togrul's "ghazu" into the desert, slaying at their will, and not returning till far into the night, when they brought back many captives, and a considerable number of the more valuable horses. Togrul Bey himself had been killed by a rifle-shot soon after his encounter with Abdallah, so that their leader slain, their band routed, and the best of their horses in the hands of the enemy, the Tuarek found themselves in a worse position than they had ever been since the accession of Feysul-ebn-Saood.

On the wounded men being examined, it was found that Abdallah had fainted more from loss of blood than from any actual damage to life. Allerton's was unquestionably the worst hurt. Isabel's wound was slight, but very painful for the time. She, however, refused even the slightest modicum of pity.

"I wouldn't have been without this experience for anything," she said. "It's a wound, and received in battle too. If I were a soldier I should be reported as slightly wounded. I am quite proud of it, I assure you. But I felt it no more at the time than a cut with a switch. It's a good thing that wretch didn't run me through the body, too. I stiffened him for the time, though. He dropped just like an old man kangaroo."

Omar and his men were all in.

> "They were weary at night when they ceased to slay,
> Like reapers whose work is done."

Togrul's branch of the Tuarek tribe had received a blow from which it would take them years to recover. Save for Abdallah's wound, the whole affair had been a triumphant victory for the ebn-Moharrek.

Now that the battle was over, the hospital work

commenced. Allerton was duly attended to, and found himself able to sit up, though weak from loss of blood, and doubtful of how long he would be on the sick-list. He was not badly off for nurses, and found one or other of the ladies of the party continuously by his couch. Abdallah was taken to the encampment at his own request, and there tended by the child Ayesha and the soldiers of his band.

It was decided to remain one day longer at the fountain for the sake of the wounded men, and then to try to reach Kosseir on the one following. It was not likely that they would be again attacked, and the patients would be better able to bear the journey on camels. It would be but for a day, and then—then they would be restored to civilisation, to alas!—Isabel sadly reflected—to prosaic security also, and to utter freedom from adventure.

With Omar, and a sufficient number of men for ambulance duty, the battle-field was explored, and the wounded (after taking precautions) brought in.

Scattered about the field, here and there, were men killed by rifle-bullets, the number of whom showed how true and close had been the aim of the marksmen. Ghastly wounds, severed heads and limbs, bore token to the keenness of the scimitars of the ebn-Moharrek. Lance wounds were plentiful, and many a swart corpse, with face towards the foe, told of the fury of the charge and the stubborn valour of the onslaught. All the wounded on both sides were brought in, including the treacherous ruffian who had done such damage, and placed in close proximity to the water, under the charge of men specially appointed to nurse them.

They were visited by Mrs. Baldhill and Marie, who, now that the fighting was over, had recovered their faculties, and distinguished themselves as hospital nurses.

"There's a chap I hit," said Mr. Baldhill, pointing to a truculent-looking Arab, with a shattered shoulder-blade. "I saw him kill two of our fellows running; one of 'em, that nice youngster that was always about with Omar. I did my best to pot him, but I only winged him after all. Anyhow, it stopped his gallop.

Water, is that what you want? Here you are! there's no malice. It was a fair fight, according to the ways of your tribe, I expect."

"Who slew the first wobber, the wedoubtable Togwul?" inquired the Honourable. "I feel anxious on that point. I sighted him wepeatedly, but that wascally chain-mail always blocked me. I suspect Jack must have potted him by a fluke."

They found the dead chief lying face downwards. He had been leaving the field, doubtless, hoping to get his men together, after the fall of Abdallah, when a long shot from the "repeater" had, possibly by chance, struck him on the back of the head. A peculiar mark of the bullet verified the gun from which it had flown.

"You must let me have that curb-chain shirt arrangement, Sir John," said Mr. Baldhill. "And the gold collar for my girl. Bella's got a bad scratch over it, and she ought to have a trophy to show. We'll hang 'em up at Merradoolah; they'll astonish the natives there with a vengeance."

"Miss Baldhill is most welcome to them or any other memento of the engagement in which she has behaved so pluckily," said Sir John. "I am only too happy to have been able to contribute my share to the victory. I think we kept up the prestige of old England among those niggers."

"We've put the fear of God in their hearts for many a day to come, take my word for it," said Mr. Baldhill; "they won't tackle the next lot of Englishmen quite so simple, I expect."

On the next day the march was resumed. The roll-call showed many a gap in the ranks of Abdallah's troop, but "it is the will of Allah" was all the *requiem* that the truest comrade gave. The dead were buried; the wounded brought along, save those who were too badly hurt. Mr. Baldhill, with his usual liberality, left a bag of piastres to be distributed among the sick and wounded of the Tuarek, and arranged that they should be brought to Kosseir when recovered sufficiently. "I couldn't content myself," he said, "if I thought those poor beggars were left behind without help or comfort.

They wouldn't have bothered about us, I expect. But that's their nature ; it isn't mine."

Allerton was provided with a litter, and hoisted on to a camel. Abdallah would not hear of being left behind, and though weak from loss of blood, managed to endure the journey. It was not far from midnight, but still on the same day as they left the fountains of Zebeydah, that the port of Kosseir was reached, where, even at that late hour, their arrival created a considerable sensation.

All sorts of rumours were in circulation on the following day, among the native inhabitants. "The troop was the sole surviving remnant of an army which a wealthy and eccentric Englishman had fitted out at his own expense for the purpose of rescuing Gordon. They had failed in their attempt, but had repulsed El Mahdi, and fought their way through the desert, when the youngest wife of the Englishman had been wounded in a skirmish with the Bishareen. It was the practice of rich Englishmen to take their wives with them to the seat of war. The other Franjis were engineers. They were going to carry out a railway from Kosseir to Keneh, or perhaps Assouan. They would make the fortunes of everybody living in Kosseir, and would turn it into a second Alexandria. They were a wonderful people, these Franjis. If Allah had not deprived them of sense, so that they went mad periodically, they would rule the whole world."

The little party of foreigners were not particularly affected by these reviews and criticisms. They were safe. The sea was before their desert-weary eyes, and the "Bahr-el-Ahmar" over which had sailed the fleets which bore to Suleiman-ebn-Daood, "gold, apes, peacocks," with other treasures of Ind. In this latter stage of the world's mysterious progress, they were chiefly interested in finding out whether or no a steamer of the gallant P. and O. was likely to call, and lo! by special interest of Isabel's guardian angel, there was. They had to wait a week, however ; but under the circumstances, no pleasanter time was ever passed in Florence, Paris, or Vienna, the choicest of earth's favourite cities. What cared they for a few days' detention? They

were absolutely safe. No marauding tribe was likely to venture so near the coast. Abdallah's troop, gallant, victorious and fêted in all the Moslem society of the place, was there, ruffling it in crimson and gold holiday attire, Mr. Baldhill having punctiliously paid up, with his two friends, the hundred piastres for each promised on arrival. They were prepared to fight the Wahhabee sultan himself, or the Mahdi's picked troops, in defence of the Bahadoor, who had mines of silver and gold in a far country, and was as generous with the precious metals as Haroun-al-Raschid himself in a good humour.

Gholab was unaffectedly pleased with having only to clean and exercise his beloved horses for the service of his mistress, and rejoiced that war's alarms were for a space in abeyance. Mr. Allerton improved daily in health and spirits, and it was confidently predicted that he would be able to walk on board the *Chusan* when she arrived. She was but a small boat comparatively, having been under the well-known Captain Down, one of the pioneers of the Australian service ; but she would serve their need, and was considerably bigger than the *Fatima*, any way. With the few English who were, like themselves, accidentally there, Isabel and Marguerite were tremendous favourites. They bowed down before them, looking upon them as heroines, who had survived the dangers of war and the desert, and had added fresh lustre to the name of England.

Gholab and the horses also came in for much attention. The wounded men were sad but unmistakable witnesses to the reality of the perils the expedition had passed through. Altogether next to Gordon himself, Mr. Baldhill found that he and his party, whose arrival had already been notified to leading English newspapers, were the most famous and celebrated personages.

Thus the time passed. Marguerite and Isabel, Marie and Mrs. Baldhill, ministered by turns to Allerton's needs as an invalid. Perhaps the two former were the most assiduous and successful as nurses. They fanned his fevered brow ; they kept up an unfailing supply of cooling drinks with which to assuage his thirst. They read and talked to him in the rare intervals when he

could bear such recreation. Finally, they had the satisfaction of discovering that he had certainly improved, and though powerless to move without help, was able to walk on board the *Chusan* when that eagerly expected steamer arrived.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE *Chusan* had come into this by no means oft-frequented port of Kosseir chiefly in consequence and on account of the general disturbance in the Soudan and the transport service generally. She was landing a corps of Royal Engineers, specially instructed to survey the route across to Keneh, in case it was definitely resolved by the Government to lay down a railway between the two points.

Having performed this transport service, the *Chusan* was to proceed to Aden; thence to be in readiness to return with one of the sepoy regiments at present quartered there, with no particular duty to perform except to see that the Arabs did not take possession of that extremely arid but valuable strategical position.

First-class English passengers for Kosseir had not been expected. An Arab merchant or two having successfully disposed of a dhow-load of slaves, a home-returning pilot, half-a-dozen Parsee store-keepers, and a runaway Somali—these were the average collection likely to avail themselves of safe transit. When, therefore, the captain and officers found so large and distinguished a party, including four ladies, with followers and appendages, waiting and anxious, they were as much delighted as surprised, and made all possible arrangements for their comfort. The captain did not exactly fancy having to take the horses, but being won over by Isabel's entreaties, capitulated, and ordered temporary boxes to be put up for their accommodation. After a couple of days' examination and contrivance, everything was fully arranged.

All went smoothly on shore, chiefly by reason of Mr. Baldhill's prompt use of his never-failing solvent, ready money.

Be sure, there were great leave-taking and farewell making. Abdallah and his band, arrayed in their finest clothes, and armed to the teeth, solemnly escorted the whole party to the shore, Abdallah himself dismounting and with Omar prostrating himself before Isabel and Mr. Baldhill in real sorrow for their departure.

It was explained to the troop that Mr. Baldhill, with the generosity which was now proverbial from the First Cataract to Assouan, had given Omar his freedom in consideration of his faithful services, besides presenting him with a sum of money calculated to make his altered condition still more agreeable. The child Ayesha refused to leave her mistress, and was therefore to accompany her to Australia, with the full permission of her brother, her only surviving relative. Sir John Danvers and his friend were curious to see Australia. They had had enough of Egypt for a while, and expressed themselves as quite ready to undergo a little Antipodean civilisation. The wounded of both sides were suitably cared for. Such was the general enthusiasm in favour of Mr. Baldhill when the *Chusan* steamed out into the main channel and took the southward course, that he might have successfully contested the Electorate of the Lower Soudan with El Mahdi himself, had universal suffrage prevailed around the Red Sea littoral.

"This is something like, at last," said Mr. Baldhill to Allerton, who, lying full length in a Cingalese cane lounge, was gratefully inhaling the sea breeze. "What does the chap say in the play? 'My foot is on my native heath': eh? I feel something like again, with the captain walking the quarter-deck, and these Lascar fellows swarming in the rigging, and the serang and his tindals, yabbering 'Jao, jao, puckeron.' It puts me in mind of old times, and my first voyage to England. This boat won't take us further than Aden; but we shall drop in for one of the regular liners there."

"Thank God we're out of the desert," said Allerton. "I don't want to hear another word about Egypt for

the next ten years. To think that I have so nearly been done for by a rascally fanatic like that Arab, and the brute dying, and knowing it too. I shall never forget Isabel's pluck, and Mrs. Mortimer's in dragging me in; that they saved my life I haven't a doubt. I feel awfully weak though. I'm not so sure that I shall pull through after all."

"You're worth two dead men yet, Bruce, my boy," said Mr. Baldhill, kindly. "A week at sea will make a deal of difference to your appetite; and after we leave Aden you'll begin to find your sea-legs again, and have plenty of nurses to look after you."

"I must make the best of it, I suppose," groaned the Australian. Wasted, languid, pallid, he looked very different from the bronzed athlete who had ridden up to the fountain at Zebeydah. "But this deathlike weakness is bad to bear. I never was a day ill in my life before, and it comes harder to me in consequence."

"It was as much as Abdallah could sit on his horse to-day," said Mr. Baldhill. "I saw that; but these Arabs recover from wounds quicker than we do. How those fellows of his fought! And so did Togrul's lot, for that matter. We're well out of it, anyway, and I've done the last exploring I'm going to tackle farther out than the three-chain road to Merradoolah."

"You mustn't talk to the sick man too much, Joe," said his worthy spouse, who now appeared on the scene with Marguerite. "He's a deal stronger than he was; but we're not going to have him put back again, are we, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"I think Mr. Allerton has wonderfully improved in the last few days," she replied; "but I have had some experience in nursing, and I know a relapse is to be dreaded."

As she spoke she made a movement forward. The strong man had grown suddenly pale, and fell forward in a swoon, as complete and lifeless as any woman with whom fear or emotion arrests the currents of life in reflex action. When he recovered, he felt that his head had been raised, the pillow adjusted; the soft, delicate hand of Marguerite was bathing his forehead, and administering restoratives, while Mrs. Baldhill on the

other side of his couch was exhibiting a truly maternal solicitude.

"You gave us both a start, Bruce," she said. "Why, Mrs. Mortimer's nigh as white as you are. I'd no idea you were so low, I'm sure. We must fatten you up now you're aboard ship, and we've got to Christian cookery again. Mind! you're not to talk. I see you understand. There's Isabel a-coming back from looking after those precious horses of hers. I must tell her she'd better keep away from you just now, and let Mrs. Mortimer stay by you till you go to sleep."

It happened that, between Kosseir and Aden, Allerton had more than one relapse, and the sanguine anticipation of his return to health was not borne out. The desert-wolf had bitten deep; a fragment of the spear-point, as was afterwards discovered, had remained in the flesh, causing irritation and feverishness, culminating in a return of the more dangerous symptoms.

During the whole voyage, therefore, Bruce Allerton, much to his annoyance, was the invalid of the party, having in his intervals of prostration, and even delirium, to be unremittingly watched and tended by one of the staff of volunteer nurses, all of whom willingly took their turn at the service.

All were anxious to help the strong, unselfish comrade, stricken down in their defence. He was now more feeble than the weakest woman in the party. Mrs. Baldhill and Marie were always in attendance when wanted. Isabel was sisterly in her care during her allotted hours of nursing; but when a longer vigil than usual was necessary, when the spirits of the wounded man became lower and more desponding, when the spasms returned with fresh intensity, it was Marguerite who handed him the cooling draught in the silence of night, when her soothing voice fell on his ears like music in the dreary intervals between feverish excitement and death-like torpor.

Who doubts—for so it has ever been—that a deep and an intense sympathy is prone to arise between persons of opposite sexes in whom imagination has not utterly died out, when the relations of patient and

nurse are continued for any lengthened period? The gentleness and the unselfish care with which all the minor necessary duties are performed cannot but appeal strongly to the heart of the recipient. If he be young and ardent he is certain to exalt into the similitude of an angel the woman whose companionship has soothed so many weary hours, whose watchful tenderness has chiefly aided recovery—nay, may even have saved a life all unworthy of her love, as it eventually may be.

If no longer young, calmer by temperament or experience, and doubtful of earthly perfection, he acquires by this a more intimate knowledge of human nature, a belief in a more elevated, more spiritualised individuality, a convert—therefore an enthusiast—on that account chiefly he is willing to risk his future happiness.

There grows up besides, insensibly, on the woman's side, too, a feeling of property in the helpless being who is so dependent upon her good offices. When the need of her services ends, a reactionary feeling of blankness and loneliness is apt to supervene; and unless the man so removed is singularly devoid of mental or physical endowment, this is his golden opportunity.

It so befell that before the *Chusan* left Aden and the passengers gazed gratefully upon the sombre volcanic peaks which compose the landscape of that interesting fortalice, Allerton had got into the habit of considering Marguerite as his regular and devoted attendant, and the others as only occasional nurses. Insensibly a more intimate knowledge of each other's characters was attained, and a familiarity of address arose which Allerton felt to be a distinct advance upon the reserve of their former acquaintance.

As for the general progress of the voyage, it was held to be a most safe and joyous ending to their somewhat too exciting experiences. Nothing was wanting on the part of the officers of the vessel—polished men of the world as well as efficient navigators, as they chiefly are in that company—to render the short interval which would elapse as pleasant and rest-giving as wind and wave would permit. Isabel's horses were petted

and pampered, until Gholab grew at times seriously angry, complaining bitterly when the time-honoured but stern dietary of the desert was interfered with. Mr. Baldhill received the full measure of respect due to his well-known Australian position, and the reputation for boundless wealth which heralded him always. The Englishmen enjoyed the total freedom from responsibility which generally characterises ocean travelling; while Marie, finding herself once more *en grande route* to Australia, and not wholly debarred from the savour of *succès de salon*, was quite in her element, happy in the present, and looking forward hopefully, though not impatiently, to a reunion with her long-expectant Alphonse.

Isabel, perhaps, of all the party, was the least satisfied, the least contented. Her energetic and restless disposition rendered her disposed to carp at the enforced inaction after the stirring life they had led of late. She was, besides, deeply grieved at the lamentable condition to which Allerton was reduced. She could not help blaming herself as the cause; nor regretting that she had induced him to expose himself so rashly. "And yet we could not see poor Abdallah perish before our eyes," she would say, for the twentieth time, in self-exculpation. "I did it for the best, Bruce. I almost wish the spear had struck me instead of you. It would only have been one foolish girl the less, and it seems so sad to see you lying here day by day."

"You don't think of your father and Mrs. Baldhill when you talk like that, Isabel," said Allerton, with a smile more like his former self than had been seen of late. "I'm afraid you want something to engage your attention profitably. What has become of the great book *The Battle of the Nile?* Has the literary fire died out?"

"Not quite, though I haven't had the heart to think much about it lately. I've kept up my journal regularly though. We've had a battle in earnest, haven't we? It was close enough to Keneh to call it *The Battle of the Nile*, and I will too. Does any one know, by the way, when the real battle of the Nile was fought?"

"I can answer that question most satisfactorily, Miss Baldhill," said the captain; "so put me at the top of

the class; besides a few other little details, if you would like to know."

"Oh! I feel so interested," said Isabel. "I have always thought it was such a splendid affair. We never seem to have such battles now. Please begin at once."

"Well, then," said the captain. "*The Times* of October 3rd, 1798, as nearly as possible—how many years ago?—contained a despatch from Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson to the Commander-in-Chief, which read as follows:—

"*Vanguard*, off the mouth of the Nile,
"*Aug. 3rd*, 1798.

"My Lord,—Almighty God has blessed his Majesty's arms in the late battle by a great victory over the fleet of the enemy, whom I attacked at sunset off the mouth of the Nile. The enemy were moored in a strong position for defending the entrance to the bay (of Shoals), flanked by numerous gunboats, four frigates, and a battery of guns and mortars on an island in their van; but nothing could withstand the squadron your Lordship did me the honour to place under my command. Their high state of discipline is well known to you, and combined with the judgment of the Captains, together with their valour and that of the officers and men of every description, it was absolutely irresistible.

"Could anything from my pen add to the character of the Captains I would write it with pleasure; but that is impossible.

"The support and assistance I received from Captain Berry cannot be sufficiently expressed. I was wounded in the head, and obliged to be carried off the deck; but the service suffered no loss by that event. Captain Berry was fully equal to the important service, and to him I must refer you for every information relative to the victory. He will present you with the flag of the second-in-command—that of the Commander-in-Chief being burned in *L'Orient*.

"Herewith I transmit to you lists of the killed and wounded, and the lines of battle of ourselves and the French.

"Horatio Nelson.

"To Admiral the Earl of St. Vincent, Commander-in-Chief, &c., off Calais."

"Good gracious, Captain Capel, one would think you'd learned it all by heart," said Isabel, "or else you've got the best memory for history I've met for ever so long. What do you think, Mr. Allerton?"

"It was a glorious victory," he said. "Out of seventeen vessels of the enemy, nine were taken, three burned, and one sunk. Four only—two liners and two frigates—escaped. It is said they were afterwards captured."

"Rule Britannia!" struck up Isabel; while just at that moment Marie came on deck.

"What is that of your national songs?" said she. "It is always of you English to commemorate some battle, some victory. Waterloo again, *par hasard?*"

"Only the battle of the Nile this time," said Isabel. "I am going to call my book by that name."

"Ah! It is well. There was a battle of your Nelson, is it not? Brueys, Admiral de France, perished in *L'Orient, et ce cher* Casabianca. Your Nelson was a *galant homme.* We Français honour his name—unlike Vilainton."

"The poor Duke," said Isabel; "he is dead, and won't mind now, perhaps—any more than that splendid Nelson, who was occasionally not so discreet. That's why everybody is so fond of him. We hate perfect people, I believe. How many were killed and wounded? That is the worst of battles, isn't it, Mr. Allerton? Think of my poor arm, too; I shall never be able to wear short sleeves."

"*Raison de plus,*" said the captain, raising his cap. "As to the butcher's bill, as we improperly term it, there were, I see, of ours 37 officers, 562 seamen, 78 marines wounded; 16 officers, 156 seamen, 46 marines killed. Total, 895. In the proportion of one ship's company, or rather more, out of the fifeeen sail, killed and wounded."

"How sad to think of," said Isabel. "How many did the French lose?"

"It was calculated at five thousand men killed and wounded. More than five times our number."

"I can't bear to think of it," said Isabel. "Read

some more, Captain Capel. Of course there is some more about it."

"Yes, there is a trifle more. But it was before the time of war correspondence. The news seems to have taken two whole months to reach England. Fancy what a state of things, with *The Times* about the size of two sheets of foolscap paper! Here is the leading article :—

"ADMIRAL NELSON'S VICTORY.

"The official news of the glorious victory obtained by Admiral Nelson over the French fleet, near Rosetta, arrived at the Admiralty yesterday morning at a quarter past eleven o'clock. It was brought by the Honourable Captain Capel, one of Lord Essex's sons, and lately made Master and Commander into the *Mutine* cutter, from the Admiralty Flagship. He was detained at Naples one day, owing to some necessary ceremony connected with the quarantine.

"The Park and Tower guns and the merry peals of the bells from the steeples of several churches, soon announced the happy news to the public. Lord Spencer wrote official information of it to the Lord Mayor, and Mr. Winchester, the messenger, was sent off express to the King at Weymouth, in order that his Majesty might learn the glad tidings before he went to rest."

"After the play, in which the part of Zanga, in *The Revenge*, was taken by Mr. Kemble, 'with a dignity of emotion which almost justified the excessive resentment of the Moor,' the news of Admiral Nelson's glorious victory produced a burst of patriotic enthusiasm that has been rarely witnessed in a theatre. 'Rule Britannia' was loudly called for from every part of the house, and Messrs. Leak, Kelly, Dignum, Sedgwick, Miss Leak, and Mrs. Bland came forward and sang it, accompanied by numbers of the audience. It was called for and sung a second time. The acclamations were the loudest and most fervent we have ever witnessed."

"I've no doubt they were," said Isabel. "How I should like to have heard that 'Rule Britannia!'

What excitement there must have been throughout the whole of England!"

"Must have had highah spiwits in those days," said the Honourable Bertie. "How they wing the changes on the mewwy peals, happy news, and all that! Couldn't even let the poor old King go to bed without wushing in with the whole stowy! Tewwible bad form, I call it."

"People feel as much now, Mr. Stanhope," said Isabel, archly, "though they may not proclaim it on the housetops as they used to do. Don't you think, sometimes, there is a little affectation about not feeling things at all?"

"Can't weally say," quoth the Honourable. "Shouldn't say there was *anything* worth howling about."

"I'm afraid you and Sir John are both *blasés*," said Isabel. "However, we'll bring out some genuine feeling in you both when you get to Merradoolah, even if we have to put you on to a buckjumper to do it."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ADEN was reached without misadventures, save those common to Red Sea voyaging. The outward-bound passengers from England were lost in amazement at the calmness with which the Australian party took the heat and other inflictions concerning which they made lamentations loud and long. They could not imagine ladies braving the ills of desert travelling, or the breezeless heat of the Red Sea, without murmur or mention.

"There are worse evils," said Marguerite, in answer to a fresh-coloured young married woman on the way out to India to join her husband, a military officer who had been compelled by the exigencies of the service to leave his bride in their first year of wedded bliss. "When one has known the real dangers of the desert, unrelieved hardships, and actual privation, it seems

childish—you must pardon me—to complain of this feather-bed travelling, where we lie with awnings above us, and only need to summon the steward for iced lemonade and fresh fruit."

"Oh, but you Australians are used to all kinds of outlandish experiences—at least the Indian ladies say so," replied the daughter of Albion; "and really the heat is terrible. I feel as if I shall die."

"Thank you and the Indian ladies for the compliment," said Marguerite, with an amused smile; "but though I am going to Australia, I have never been there in my life; nor has Marie, who is French, as I am altogether English. Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill, their daughter, and Mr. Allerton are the only Australians of the party. We have been six months in Egypt, it is true, but that is rather a fashionable bit of travel. I do not see why we should differ from ordinary Britons."

"Oh! is that nice-looking man, who is so ill and wasted, an Australian too? I thought he was an Indian officer on sick leave. Well, really Miss Baldhill is very pretty, and would create a sensation anywhere. Is her father as rich as they say? And did she really get wounded in a battle with the Arabs?"

"Very slightly, yes. I really have no idea of the amount of Mr. Baldhill's income. I presume he is fairly well off, as neither he nor Mr. Allerton seem to consider the matter of finance very closely."

"Dear me, how nice!" said the young matron. "I wonder when Harry and I will attain to that enviable state? Miss Baldhill seems very quiet and unpretending in her manner. I shouldn't think she was the sort of girl to go rushing into a skirmish with wild Arabs."

"She is much like all well-educated girls, only exceptionally sweet-tempered and amiable," said Marguerite. "Perhaps she has more courage than the sex is generally credited with. If it had not been for her presence of mind, our Arab ally, Abdallah, would have been killed before our eyes, and possibly Mr. Allerton too."

"What a brave girl she must be, and so young, though she looks nearer nineteen than seventeen to my eyes. I hardly thought such nice people could come

from Australia; but the truth is I didn't know much about the country or people, and I am nearly as ignorant of India."

Bruce Allerton, strange to say, did not appear to gain strength. At times his spirits were high, and he told himself and his fellow-voyagers that he was in a fair way of recovery, and would probably join them in a few days. Then, inexplicably, his strength would desert him as rapidly as it had arisen. Dreadful weakness would supervene. Terrible fits of despondency came next. Languor, delirium, and fever would again take possession of the wasted frame. A death-like pallor would overspread his features. It was hard to imagine that the stricken invalid lying so prone and nerveless upon his couch was ever the sportsman, the hunter, the tireless explorer of a few months back. "It was hard to bear, but it was the mercy of God which had rescued and preserved him so far," said Mrs. Baldhill. Now at Aden, or Galle at farthest, they would be able to procure the services of a medical man, in whose charge he could be safely left, if they decided to go to Australia without him.

"Go on without him!" echoed Isabel. "Oh! mother, that isn't like you at all. How could we leave him behind, to die in solitude—supposing he did die? If you do go on to your beloved Sydney before he's better, you may leave me behind, that's all. I won't stir a step until he's better—or worse—worse, think of that! And you'll stay with me, Mrs. Mortimer, won't you? Say you will. You wouldn't surely go and leave him, even if you had to work your passage back to England as stewardess?"

"I am quite sure, Isabel, your mother never dreamed of leaving Mr. Allerton unless he was quite out of danger," said Marguerite, in her low, vibrating voice. "But you are right in thinking I would not quit Mr. Allerton in any case while he required our care."

"Of course," protested her mother, "I never meant to go away and leave him unless he was on the way to get well, but not strong enough to bear all the rough knocking about of these steamers every time the wind shifts. I think you are in a great hurry, Miss Bella,

to believe that no one has any heart but yourself. I should just as soon think of deserting my own son, my darling Sydney, if he had been alive."

Isabel here relieved her feelings by throwing her arms round the old lady's neck, and having what young women call "a good cry," during which performance she informed her mother that she was the best of living parents, and that she, Isabel, deserved to be whipped and sent to bed, which awful executive sentence had been carried out once, and once only, in her extremely fortunate record of home education.

It had chanced somehow that by far the more considerable portion of the nursing of which Mr. Allerton stood in such sore need had fallen to the share of Marguerite Gordon. Isabel pitied the state and condition of the wounded knight, and from time to time devoted herself with her usual thoroughness to his aid and consolation. But, restless and impatient of mood, to sit by a sick couch resignedly was foreign to her nature. It frequently happened, therefore, that she was called away, as fresh occurrences or exciting events summoned her. Her "fancies and feelings, like birds on the wing," were too imperatively volatile and impulsive to permit her to remain long at a time by the sick man's side.

Such things as were sufficient, however, to lure the eager girl from her self-imposed task, or to cause her to call Marie to take her place, had no influence over Marguerite's more steadfast soul. Hour after hour, day after day, would she sit silently yet cheerfully by the side of the feverish or unconscious invalid, ever ready to minister to his lightest wish, to bathe his throbbing brow, to pour the cooling draught, to lift the weary pillow that he so hated yet could not quit.

The sombre volcanic peaks of Aden were as sharply outlined against the cloudless sky as when they saw them last, but the "melancholy rock in a far distant sea," was now in a state of abnormal upheaval and excitation. There was as much chattering and gesticulating among the sepoy regiments, who with their families and camp followers occupied its lines, as would have sufficed to move the whole British army. There

was something repugnant to British taste in the loose-robed Moslems who lounged across from their tents to the parade. But once ranked and in uniform, they had the appearance of steady and effective troops, who would no doubt give a good account of their co-religionists, for these were chiefly Mussulmen from Delhi, if ever they got within bayonet length of them.

"We should have been very glad to have seen these fellows at our back," said Sir John Danvers, who with the rest of the party had arrested their course to the tanks in order to inspect the march past. "How steady they are. Their drill must be regular and strict."

"They've got English officers," proclaimed Mr. Baldhill, from the dizzy height of a camel, upon which unusual animal he had taken a fancy to ride the short distance necessary. "All the non-commissioned officers, though, like our sergeants and corporals, are natives. They won't trust 'em to be captains and majors."

"Quite right, too," said Sir John; "we had a lesson about that in the last war. Jack Sepoy, whether Brahmin or Mussulman, fights well, and is a very good soldier, when he has faith in his officer. But we should never forget that they belong to a conquered nation, to an alien, and, so to speak, oppressed race. They hate us in their hearts, with a bitter, endless, unreasoning hate. We should be kind and firm with them, but never give them the opportunity of paying off old scores."

"There are other people to whom the same reasoning applies. Jack Sepoy is not alone, though we act as if we thought so. Justice is the religion of nations, but blind trust is generally misplaced, and often disastrous in result."

The tanks are the great sight which everybody goes to see at Aden. Thither accordingly the travellers wended their way, passing close by one of the high archways in the wall which surrounds the town, and through which they had a glimpse of the desert. By the gateway paced the British sentry in the uniform

with which so many of the waste places of the earth have become familiar.

A couple of Arabs had just been admitted, bringing with them a camel laden with dhurra, maize stalks, and firewood, on the high piled top of which a goat balanced itself proudly, and surveyed the surrounding scene.

Before they were suffered to enter the town, they were searched for arms, and a kandjah or dagger, also a long gun, taken from them.

"This precaution was rendered necessary," said Sir John, "after one or two officers had been stabbed, one mortally. Fanatics find their way in, and if armed, are sure to do damage. They take care to draw their stings now."

"What permanent improvements those Roman fellows put up," said Mr. Baldhill, looking at the deep transparent water in the tanks, bordered with green umbrageous trees and with iron railings, through which stone stairs led far down to the reservoir's edge. "Everywhere you go it's the same story. Roman roads that are used still, and aqueducts like railway works. The guide book says these waterholes were dug out of the solid rock and cemented nearly three thousand years ago."

"They were repaired and these trees planted by us about five-and-twenty years back," said Sir John. "Fellows told me that the cement that was picked out was as compact as the rock itself. Much of the work did not need repair or alteration."

"I wish they'd have come to the West Logan when they were about it," said Mr. Baldhill, thoughtfully. "I know some runs up there that these things would have suited to a 'T.' But our country didn't belong to the map of the world in those days."

"Most likely not," said Sir John; "and now having done the tanks, suppose we go down to those Parsee shops, and see what there is to buy. Of course Miss Baldhill wants something to take with her."

"I should think so," said Isabel. "Think what a time it is since I've seen a shop; I want a pair of gazelles, some ostrich eggs, and lots of things."

"Haven't you got enough yet, pussy?" inquired her father doubtfully. "Anyhow, as we've got safe here, I won't balk your fancy, darling. Buy a shopful if you like, and a ship to take it home in."

"I'm not going to be extravagant, dad, but I've always wanted—

'A dear gazelle,
To glad me with its soft, dark eye.'

and as this is its native land, and we're not going to come back in a hurry, I may as well make sure of a couple here—lovely little things that they are."

Returning to the town they managed to lunch with an approximation to comfort, after which they proceeded to a market-place, where all sorts of things justly regarded as rarities were for sale, either by the Parsee shopkeepers with their long high dark caps, or by Arabs and Somalis.

Here the gentlemen availed themselves of the opportunity to invest in striped silk pugarees, papooshes, delicately cool garments, and pipes of various length of stem and capacity of bowl; while Isabel carried off triumphantly three gazelles, four ostrich eggs, and a pound of feathers, a brass lotah, and several of the black and white hair-covered Aden sheep.

"They will look so nice in the home paddock at Merradoolah," she said, coaxingly, as her father demurred to this last purchase, setting forth as a fact bearing on the question that as there were a hundred and fifty thousand sheep there already, it was hardly worth while adding these to them. "Such brutes, too," he remarked *sotto voce*.

"Oh, but they're so delightfully ugly," said Isabel; "that's the very reason; they look more like goats than sheep, I must say, but they're not at all bad to eat. There must be some sheep with wool on them in the desert, daddy, though, because we saw a camel come in as we were at the gate with two bales packed on him."

"I don't care what they've got," said Mr. Baldhill,

"you'll never catch me here again; our dry country's bad enough, but you don't get four or five hundred fellows on horseback stickin' you up on an overland track. But I've done with 'em for good; they may take the whole country, from the Cataracts to Cairo, for all I care."

"But think of Gordon, daddy! You don't want him to be sacrificed, surely?" and here Isabel's eye showed a dangerous glitter. "If anything happens to him, I'll turn Catholic and go into Soubiaca; so you and Gladstone had better mind."

"Gordon's quite able to take care of himself, my pet," said Mr. Baldhill, soothingly. "Don't you know we heard that he had retaken Berber, and had gained a victory over the rebel Arabs. Depend upon it, he'll keep things straight till the relief force under Lord Wolseley gets to Khartoum."

"Why didn't they send it before?" said the girl, indignantly. "If it was worth while doing at all, why not do it at the right time? They have a thousand miles to march. They'll lose a lot of brave men. Every tribe in the desert knows they're on the way. Khartoum may be taken and sacked, and Gordon dead or broken-hearted, weeks and months before they get there. I've no patience with that Liberal Government. They're not fit to manage a big cattle-muster, much less a war."

"We must have a federation of the Australian representatives in the Imperial Parliament, with female suffrage to follow!" said Allerton, with a faint smile, as he raised himself on his couch. "Miss Isabel Baldhill will be elected as one of our first representatives. The British Lion will kinder quail then, as our American friend would say."

"It's all very well to laugh," said Isabel. "But that dear old Gladstone talks too well to be much of a general. I don't believe there ever was a general who could speak much. He's always thinking about his three score and talking about the future, while the opportunity is running away from him as fast as it can gallop. He's like a man who gives you a treatise on horse-breaking instead of going to catch your horse when he's thrown you."

"I'm afraid, Isabel, that you're irreverent, like too many young people of the day—far too prone to underrate the experience of age," said Marguerite. "You mustn't speak evil of dignities, you know."

"If Gordon's life is lost, muddled away before our eyes, and all those poor creatures that depended upon England's protection abandoned to those bloodthirsty savages of Arabs," said Isabel, "I think the English people will say something, unless they've changed their nature very much. I wish, oh! how I wish I were a man, and in the English Parliament. I think I could say a few things people would listen to."

"You must mawwy in England, and coach up your husband, Miss Baldhill," said the Honourable Bertie. "That's the way to get a hearing nowadays. Buy a Conservative seat, and dish the wetched Wadicals. The thing's painfully easy."

"Perhaps I've been talking a little fast," said Isabel, with a slight blush. "But I do get so excited when I think of the danger poor Gordon's in, that I hardly know what I am saying."

"Wait till I'm well again, Isabel, and I'll devote myself to the cause," said Allerton. "One may just as well live in London as Sydney, if the seasons keep good. I'll get appointed Agent-General, and put on pressure."

"You'll have to work a good deal harder than you've ever done before, then," retorted the fiery damsel. "How you can go on for ever dawdling about the world for years and years as you do, while there's a man's work ready for you in half-a-dozen places, I can't think! But wait till you're well," she added, with a softened tone, as she bent over him, and arranged his pillow. "I mustn't scold you now, poor fellow! They say on board that there's a great army surgeon from Bombay waiting at Galle for the steamer. We must make him put you right, or else our glorious victory will be all in vain."

The sun was low as the whole party went on board; the last coal sack had been stowed, while decks and saloons were still grimy with the unaccustomed dust. Isabel amused herself for a time by throwing in shillings for the

Somali boys to dive for, and finally managed to convey her multitudinous treasures, alive and otherwise, on board. As the last sun-rays illumined the darksome peaks of the lone outpost, and the crimson lines of light faded first into paler hues and then into one uniform neutral tint, the mighty heart of the great steamship appeared to throb as she slowly moved outward into the mid-channel, and was soon speeding with guarded swiftness over the dim, flickering plain towards the grim Cape of Fires which cries aloud, "Africa, Africa" to the voyager from the farthest south.

"Only one more stage," said Mrs. Baldhill to Marguerite, "and we shall be heading straight for dear old Australia again. I'm that sick of black faces and palm trees, and sand, and sun, that I sha'n't stir outside of our house at Darling Point for many a day. Travelling's all very nice for you young people, but comfort's everything as you get on in life, and we do live pretty snug in Sydney, to my thinking, even after seeing England."

"Is Sydney a beautiful place?" asked Marguerite, with a sigh, as she thought that, now a settled life seemed imminent—the distractions of danger and adventure were laid to rest—the lulled memories of her former life would again be revived, like the fabled ashes. Would they slumber, or evermore writhe and torment her?

"Wait till you see, my dear," said the Australian lady with a smile of pardonable pride, all unheeding of the hidden agony. "I think you'll find our cottage snug. It's shady enough at any rate, and when you shut the rooms up early, and keep them dark, you can hardly tell whether it is a hot day or a cool one outside. We must telegraph from Adelaide to have the carriage to meet us. Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wish we were going inside the Heads now."

CHAPTER XXXIX

GALLE Harbour! A vision of glory, of Eden in primal loveliness. The swaying palms murmured around the hoary ramparts. The bright red streets were filled with a gentle, mild-eyed, picturesque population, undistinguishable chiefly as to sex, by reason of the males setting as much value upon their "back hair"—silken, abundant, and lustrous—as do the gentler sex. Far in the distance towered the wonder-mountain, Adam's Peak. To the sensitive organs of Isabel, the proverbial spiceries which "blow soft from Ceylon's isles"—were distinctly apparent. Alas! for this unromantic age—far more excitement was exhibited by the male passengers with regard to the precise moment of time at which the *Chusan* passed the last harbour buoy, inasmuch as nearly every one in the ship had a pecuniary interest in the event, the Indian officers having got up a "pool" on the event, to be won by him whose throw as to the precise moment of entrance to the harbour was nearest the fact. Mr. Baldhill, who had taken no part in the "consultation," was prevailed upon to stand upon the bridge with the captain, and note the time to the second by his repeater. He announced it to be exactly twelve minutes past 10 A.M., a declaration which caused the Honourable Bertie to be richer by the sum of fifty-four pounds ten shillings, he having made the luckiest cast of the dice.

One day only could be spared for coaling, and for the glories of Galle. Even so short a stay was a relief from the tedium of the passage from Aden, part of which had been exceedingly hot and sultry. The major part of the passengers hied themselves to Wak-wallah, and the cinnamon gardens, unwilling to lose a moment of the short holiday.

With the Australians a different course of action was imperative. Bruce Allerton's health had so seriously suffered during the voyage from Aden that grave apprehensions for his recovery began to be felt. His feverish attacks had increased in number and seriousness, the

state of weakness to which he was reduced was pitiable to behold. Day after day the ordinary signs of mortal sickness became more potent and persistent. He himself despaired at heart, and confessed at length his belief that there was severe internal injury, to which he must succumb.

"Internal fiddlesticks!" said Isabel. "I don't believe there's anything the matter with you except a piece of bone or stick or something left after that wretch's spear. You're never going to give in that you were killed by a dead Arab, with a broken spear! Ha! I thought that would make you laugh. Now, don't you go and die before your time comes. I'll tell you when there's no hope, and you promise me not to think of it till then. Won't you, Bruce?"

The sick man's face relaxed. "You're a queer girl, Isabel. I'm afraid you would make me laugh if the death-rattle was in my throat. But I'll attend to your wishes."

"And the best thing too. Now I found where that famous Bombay army surgeon is staying. He's at the Colombo Hotel. He thinks he's going on to-morrow, but he isn't. He must stay here and cure you, if pappy has to give him an annuity. They say he knows more about wounds than any man in India. So of course he must find out all about yours."

"Couldn't be a better chance," said Mr. Baldhill. "We'll go straight to the Colombo, and take up all the spare rooms. We must collar the doctor whatever happens. I dare say we can square it somehow——"

. . . . . .

Within an hour the whole party were safely and pleasantly lodged in that well-remembered caravanserai. As they entered the lofty open hall, and saw the cool balconies and shaded courtyard, Isabel uttered a cry of joy, which caused Allerton to raise his head from his couch, carried by four bearers.

"Oh! what a lovely place! Look at that splendid banana; and how cool the tiled roof must be. I am quite sure you will recover here, Bruce, if it is for nothing but the coolness and comfort of the whole thing. Order in breakfast, dad, while I forage about for the doctor.

You can attack him after breakfast, you know. He'll be in a better temper then, and so will you."

When Isabel returned, bringing word that the great Dr. Warburton, on his way home *viâ* Australia to be knighted, would be happy to see Mr. Baldhill at half-past ten o'clock, the aspect of the breakfast-table was cheerful and inspiriting.

Fresh fruit, oranges, bananas, pineapples, guavas, all things which could tempt the languid appetite were there; fish, game, fresh bread, butter, eggs, all the essentially shore-going luxuries of which the passengers had necessarily been deprived. Every one was in excellent spirits. Marguerite's face lost its aspect of sad repose, Marie chirped like an uncaged bird; even the wasted lineaments of the invalid appeared for the moment to have regained something of their former steadfast cheerfulness.

"The air of this place must be good for me," he said. "I don't know whether I am deceiving myself, but I am sensible of a wonderful change generally."

"It is good to have faith," said Marguerite. "I disbelieve in miracles, as a rule, but I have known, in hospital experience, wonderful instances of sudden recovery for which there was no explanation."

"If watchful nursing will save any one," he said, with a look of gratitude, as he turned towards her, "you and Isabel, with my other kind friends, have saved my life. I must only trust that when this pundit of medicine comes, he may be able to hit upon some novelty in treatment and cure me out of hand. I feel a difference in my chest this morning, and have lost the gnawing pain which was killing me."

At the appointed hour Dr. Warburton made his appearance—a stern-faced, elderly man, who looked as if wounds and death, fever and pestilence, were things of course and everyday matters of business with him.

"Mr. Baldhill, I presume; much pleasure in making your acquaintance," he said. "This gentleman the patient? Hum, ha! Spear wound—Arab—bad style of laceration generally—confound them—never know where you are. Examination necessary. Perhaps the ladies had better retire; sorry to be peremptory"

Here the arbiter of fate, the trained antagonist of disease, the confronter of death in many a varied form, raised his hat and relaxed the official sternness perceptibly. Mrs. Baldhill and Marie went first; then Marguerite, reluctantly; Isabel stood for a moment, with a *mutine* expression, then addressed the august autocratic personage.

"I'm as certain as anything in the world, Dr. Warburton, that part of that spear has been left behind. From the way Mr. Allerton moves, you can see something hurts him. He's easier this morning, and it may have shifted. I'm only a girl, I know, but I thought it right to tell you."

"My dear young lady," said the great surgeon, bowing with grave politeness, "I am always ready to profit by information; you have behaved courageously, and sensibly. Be assured that I shall attach due weight to your suggestion." Here he bowed again, and Isabel followed the others.

"I will ask a few questions," he said, turning to Mr. Baldhill, "then before I decide upon any specific line of treatment, I shall prefer to see my professional brother, the medical gentleman of the steamer in which you arrived. Perhaps you will oblige me by sending a messenger for him."

This was done, and Dr. Warburton had a short but pointed conversation outside with Mr. Baldhill, after which he re-entered the room and commenced an easy and natural colloquy with Bruce Allerton.

When the doctor of the *Chusan* was announced, the medical gentlemen retired, and, after consultation, re-appeared in the room.

"Dr. Evans and I," said the army surgeon, "have carefully considered the symptoms, and have, as we suppose, arrived at a satisfactory diagnosis. I have been much assisted by the observations of my friend here, made on the voyage. We have arrived at our decision."

"Don't hesitate in announcing it," said Bruce Allerton. "If my time has come, the sooner I am told the truth the better. The news will not be unexpected. If an operation is to be performed, I am ready to bear it."

"You have saved me some trouble, my dear sir," said the surgeon. "We are of opinion that a splinter of wood or bone has been detached from the weapon, and is now lodged internally, causing irritation, with possibly dangerous consequences. An operation is, in our opinion, necessary, which, as I wish to have this gentleman's assistance, I will undertake this afternoon. I may say that I have every hope of a successful termination."

The pale face of the sufferer grew more set and contracted, but the steadfast eyes smiled as he said, "Lose no time, doctor, I am ready at any moment. You have relieved me very much. I had lately come to the same opinion myself."

Dr. Evans, of the *Chusan*, was a capable and qualified practitioner, but he was young in his profession, and had not considered himself to be justified in assuming the responsibility of so important an operation. He was highly gratified at being associated with so eminent a surgeon, and made all necessary preparations for the event.

If it succeeded, Bruce Allerton would be convalescent in a month. If anything went wrong, if the seat of the mischief was too intimately connected with a vital organ, another brave and gallant spirit would pass away, a needless, inexplicable sacrifice. That was all.

This part of the affair being disposed of, Mr. Baldhill called Dr. Warburton aside. "Now, doctor," he said, "I know this operation is, in one way, a dangerous one. I suppose we may call it so, seeing that poor Bruce is so low and weak."

"That is where the risk undoubtedly lies," said the surgeon. "I have little fear of the result otherwise. But in his present state of health he may succumb. The most careful nursing and restorative treatment will be necessary for more than a month after the operation."

"Can you stay for that time, and watch over the whole affair? Give an eye to the case, and see that we're doing right, and so forth, as I'm as anxious about him as if he were my own son."

Here Mr. Baldhill looked at the man, who, in his estimation, held the scales of life and death, with a

wistful, appealing expression upon his rugged features that was piteous to behold. It touched the heart of the army surgeon—a man to whom wounds and death had been for many a year the merest commonplaces of daily life.

"I am most anxious, indeed forced, to leave this hot climate. My own health has been impaired by long residence in India; but, under the circumstances, I will stay another month, or for such time as may be necessary. My fee, however, will be heavy."

"Name the amount—five hundred—a thousand! Anything you like to say," said Mr. Baldhill, with effusive gratitude. "My draft on London, Robert Brooks and Co., is good for cash here, I dare say. Anyhow, the money part needn't stop matters; Bruce and I can settle that afterwards—don't tell him a word."

"The smaller sum will do very well," said Doctor Warburton; "and now, my dear sir, you had better prepare the ladies for the perhaps doubtful side of the event, and at three o'clock, Dr. Evans and I will be ready to begin. I must get the hospital surgeon here to help us with some of the necessary instruments and antiseptic bandages."

CHAPTER XL

THE operation was commenced. Difficult, delicately hazardous in its probings amid the great vital organs and the internal mysterious formation. Poor human nature pays dearly for a higher mechanical standard in a capacity for tortures indescribable, unparalleled among sentient creatures.

It appeared that Isabel's conjecture was true. A portion of the spear had broken off when the weapon was pulled out, remaining in dangerous proximity to the cœliac axis, and needing all the skill, courage, and coolness of the practised operator who now ventured to undertake the terrible risk.

Though patient and resigned, in one respect, however, Bruce Allerton withstood authority. He would not permit chloroform to be used, preferring, if he died under the knife, of which there was no remote chance, to retain full possession of his senses to the last. He flinched not from the terrible ordeal, and by his calm endurance of the inevitable agony gave greater confidence to the surgeons.

All was done that human skill could devise. The terrible wound was re-opened—the jagged fragment was extracted—the exhausted patient removed; all that was now necessary, Dr. Warburton averred, was to adhere with minute exactitude to his written instructions as to medicines and diet, stimulants and sedatives; any failure of which in the state of death-like weakness to which the patient had been reduced might suddenly terminate his existence. If this were done, if the weather continued cool, if his constitution disclosed no hidden weakness, if no detail of nursing was omitted—then—but then only—there was a reasonable expectation that perfect recovery would take place.

"It seems to me that the doctor hardly thinks poor Bruce will recover," said Mrs. Baldhill, a few days afterwards; "that's the reason he's so careful to let us know how many chances there are against him; either that, or he doesn't like to make little of his cure."

"I hardly think that," answered Marguerite, who had been most unremitting in her attendance upon the sick man, taking indeed Marie's share of night-work as well as her own, and in every way assuming a right to the chief burden of responsibility. "But I could scarcely realise his being so weak, so helpless. I think he's better to-day, however, than he has been yet. The wound begins to heal, and the doctor thinks the appearance favourable."

"Pray God in His mercy that it may," said the tender-hearted matron. "It would be like losing poor Sydney over again if he went now. I've known him ever since he rode his first pony, and he always puts me in mind of my own poor boy. But we'll have *you* on the sick list, Mrs. Mortimer, if we don't mind. You've no rest night or day, and it's telling on you, I can see."

"I am renewed in health and strength," said Mar-

guerite. "But little is left for me to do in this world that takes the shape of duty. I may well devote myself to works of mercy if they come across my path. I need not say I share in the strong friendship you all have for Mr. Allerton."

"I don't know what's come to Isabel lately," said Mrs. Baldhill, continuing the thread of her own thoughts rather than replying to her companion's words. "The child's out of sorts, full of fancies, and cries at the least thing. I expect this anxiety about poor Bruce, on the top of the battle and all that, has been too much for her. I shall be glad, as I said before, when we're out of this place and safe inside the South Head Lighthouse. That'll come natural to me again, and nothing here does; though this isn't a bad place to stop at, everything considered."

Marguerite had herself noted the change that had recently taken place in Isabel's demeanour. Instead of being the life of the party, her light-hearted manner had given place to one of uncertainty and caprice, with intervals of deep despondency.

Lastly, neglecting all ordinary objects of interest, she devoted herself to the care of the sick man, rivalling Marguerite herself in the unwearied industry with which she studied his every shade of improvement and relapse. She grudged the moments, apparently, which were not spent in ministering to his comfort.

Slowly the anxious days, the weary nights, passed on. The skill and assiduity of the practised healer were, however, never wanting. At every turn of the dread struggle between life and death which such a battle of the vital forces illustrates, his ready aid and counsel were forthcoming. At length, though tardily and reluctantly, the time of doubt and danger drew to a close. Words of encouragement from him were more frequent, and in the last week of the month which had been stipulated for the long-expected verdict of "out of danger" was pronounced.

That day was held, for the first time since the *Chusan* had sailed southward, as one of festal cheer. The object of so much solicitude was sufficiently advanced in convalescence to be removed to one of the airy, bal-

conied rooms which commanded a far-reaching view of the harbour, the distant groves, and purple mountains. And in fulness of heart the assembled party of friends made merry over the restoration of him above whom the shadow feared of man had so long been hovering.

Sir John Danvers and Stanhope, who had been absent on a visit to certain hospitable coffee-planters whose acquaintance they had made, returned in time to add to the general congratulations, and to express their satisfaction as well at Allerton's recovery as at the prospect of quitting the East in a body by the *Indus* (P. and O.), which was now daily expected.

"Splendid scenewy, glowious climate, pictuwesque suwwoundings," said the Honourable Bertie, in explanation of their experiences; "but wather too much of the Indian business ovah again. Done it befoah; seem to know it all like a book. Weady to woam thwough the pathless solitudes of Austwalia, Miss Isabel, by your side, and to chase the bounding kangawoo."

"Very glad to hear we shall be off again on Thursday," said Danvers; "now that Allertno's nearly on his pins again, we're all due for a little extra amusement. Heard any news of Gordon recently, Miss Isabel? I've rather neglected his movements lately."

"He captured Berber the other day," replied that damsel, with returning animation. "Think of that. The Mahdi's adherents are quarrelling among themselves, and Lord Wolseley is pushing on his relief expedition by the Nile, though I think it is a pity they didn't go by Suakim and across the desert."

"Pace evewything in these mattahs," said the Honourable Mr. Stanhope. "Didn't seem to think the march ovah the—ah, desaht—feasible. Distance appawently twifling, aftah all."

"Only two hundred miles," said Isabel. "Why, what is that, with all the help they have at command? The Government aggravates me by the slowness with which they do things. There's no dash about them. Mr. Cook and his tourists could march to Khartoum if they had time allowed. British soldiers are brave

enough, we all know; but they've no idea of fast travelling, it always seems to me."

"We must have an Australian general or two, with a brigade of irregular cavalry, some day," said Dr. Warburton; "eh? Miss Baldhill? We shall have to go to the New World, I believe, to learn the proper commissariat business. Our home people are too full of precedent. I've seen it in the days of the Mutiny. Terrible slow-coaches sometimes! I dare say our friend here"—turning to Allerton—"will be glad to mount his favourite horse again."

"Can words express what my feelings would be to feel myself a man again, and breathe the free bush air once more—God's glorious oxygen, as poor Gordon has it?"—replied Allerton. "But I should never have backed another horse, or seen another cattle-camp, which I hope to show our friends, if it had not been for my dear nurses here; should I, doctor? I put you out of the question, you see."

"It was a *very* near thing, I can assure you, my dear sir; I do not now mind admitting so much. All depended upon the nursing, and to these ladies"—here the doctor waved his hand comprehensively—"I consider that under Providence you may be said to owe your life. And now the best thing you can do to repay them fully, and to be enabled to show your gratitude, is to get strong as fast as you can, and avoid all but cheerful subjects of conversation. I have the honour, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, to propose the health of Mr. Allerton's lady nurses, and trust that he may be spared to exhibit his gratitude in such form as may be most gratifying to one and all of them."

"Wather owacular and pwophetic, doctor," said the Honourable. "But pwobably time will pwovide the solution."

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Once again preparations were made for a life amid wild wind and dashing wave. The huge *Indus*, one of the largest passenger steamers in the world, had arrived and would speedily depart towards the long untravelled land of the south. Being the cold weather season, she was crowded with Indian passengers, and for the two

days which her coaling required at Galle, they made a very sensible difference in the social atmosphere. Allerton was visibly gaining strength. His party therefore felt themselves justified in surrendering themselves to a reactionary carnival excitement. There happened to be a larger proportion than usual of home-returning Australians, to whom Allerton and the Baldhill family were well known. By way of change Mr. Baldhill organised a mammoth pic-nic to Wak-wallah, to which not only the Australians, but those friends and intimates whom they had made on the voyage were bidden. Fellow-passengers! What a world of memories—mirthful or, alas! pathetic—does the phrase evoke! What volumes might be written of the confidences, the sudden friendships, the unchecked intimacies, the irrevocable partings of a voyage! Does not a week of "board-ship" life, in the long, aimless, dreamy days, the still, starry, glowing nights, with none of the cares of life to check the growth of passionate love, of tenderest friendship, count for more than a year upon prosaic *terra firma?*

In that wondrous microcosm, the hollow oak or metal shell that holds so safe and speeds so sure its chance-gathered company of souls, rocked in its ocean cradle between the twin immensities of sea and sky, what communing of spirits is possible, nay, well-nigh compulsory! How the like-minded, the souls akin, rush to each other as by chemical attraction! What compacts of defence are made against the unsympathetic and the aggressive! How the stranger of yesterday becomes the pleasing acquaintance, the valued friend, ay, the ardent lover, long ere the short term of sea-journeying be passed!

It may have been that some, if not all, of these graduated socialities had been reached by the Australian passengers of the *Indus*. It may have been that the fame of Mr. Baldhill's princely hospitality and the exceptional adventures of the party had reached the *Indus viâ* Aden. However that may be, the friends of the Australian passengers were nearly as many in number as themselves, and with a proportion of the officers of the vessel made up the largest party for a *Fête Champêtre* which had taken the Wak-wallah road

since the last Viceroy's time. Bruce Allerton, driven in a carriage drawn by Arab ponies, was strong enough to join the cheerful throng. Isabel threw off her late fit of depression, and, mounted upon Zohrab, caracoled forth, the centre of a group of her own countrymen, who having provided themselves with steeds preferred —*more majorum*—the saddle to the carriage cushion. The day was exquisite, and all Galle was in ferment at the scale of the entertainment.

CHAPTER XLI

WARM as high noon would necessarily find it, the day commenced with the fresh coolness which in tropical countries is as delicious as it is rare. Nothing could have been more favourable to the festive project. Soldiers and sailors, civilians and colonists, ladies and landsmen, all hailed the auspicious morn with feelings of joyful surprise and sanguine anticipation. Mr. Baldhill seemed determined that they should not be disappointed, and so bent the whole force of his will with an organising faculty which had before now compassed considerable enterprises to the successful carrying out of his programme.

To this end he made all possible preparations for the comfort of the ladies of the party. Half of the hackney carriages in Galle were hired; these were fairly comfortable four-wheelers, with hoods that protected from the sun, drawn for the most part by small, spirited Eastern horses. Ponies as they were, they were quite equal to the short stage over the level, well-kept, winding road from Point de Galle to Wak-wallah.

By ten o'clock the whole party—or series of parties, more properly—was on the march, amid mirth, satire, frolic spirits, and laughter sufficient for the mobilisation of the Household Brigade.

Besides Isabel, a few of the Indian ladies had elected to ride on horseback, but the best palfrey procurable for

love or money at Galle looked like a half-conditioned "tatt" when contrasted with the lofty bearing, satin-skinned elegance, and aristocratic manners of Zohrab, while Gholab, richly dressed, attended on Zuleika, and divided the admiration of the public with his mistress.

"Now I can take some pleasure in being on horseback again," said Isabel, as she reined her proud steed near the carriage in which Marguerite sat. "If Bruce had died, it would have broken my heart. What a dreadful thing it is to have a friend taken from you suddenly—from your side, as it were—in all his health and strength! How different the sky looks—the trees, that lovely lake! The face of nature seems changed to me—a sort of *Fata Mergana*. I feel as if I had not a wish on earth ungratified; that is if my darling gazelles survive the voyage, and Khartoum is relieved."

"You are expressing what we all feel," said Marguerite. "With your customary frankness, my dear child, you have opened a window into your heart. Words cannot tell the thankfulness I feel also at Mr. Allerton's recovery. Like you, I could hardly have borne his death; that is—if—if other duties did not intervene."

As the gay cavalcade swept on, the sailors riding with proverbial recklessness, the carriages following and occasionally racing each other; groups of white-robed natives appearing deeply interested in the strange behaviour of their English visitors; the silver waters of the great artificial lakes flower-bespangled as they were in the golden sun; the green-gloomed forest, through which the white pillars of a temple were ever and anon shining—the scene was indescribably lovely, varied and enchanting as a revel of Boccaccio. Of the glory of the tropical forest through which the bright red road led them, how can one hope to convey a dim expression? Columnar palms; the jak-fruit tree, with fluted lustrous leaves; the great topes of lofty, feathery bamboo, flower and climber, shrub and forest tree, were all mingled together in lavish, glittering confusion, and heaped up vegetable wealth.

"The Garden of Eden will be less faint and shadowy

in my mind henceforth," said Isabel. "That is one thing. What a wonderful green those rice fields are! And look at those dear little children." (Here one little elf threw her bouquet at her, trusting to her good feeling and the chance of future payment.) "And oh, what lovely water-lilies growing in that tank, with the granite wall around it! Will no one risk his life for my sake, and gather me some?"

The Honourable Bertie here dismounted gravely and walked to the edge of the tank, as if about to wade in for the coveted large white-star flowers which lay on the bosom of the lake; but, with characteristic coolness, he signalled to a native, who was sitting near, taking out at the same time a silver coin. The Cingalese, who was inexpensively arrayed in thin cotton robes, made no more ado, but solemnly walked in nearly up to his chin, and plucking the flowers handed them to the Honourable. He then shook himself, much as a Newfoundland dog would have done, then calmly sat down on the steps in the sun to dry.

"How wonderfully obliging they are," said Isabel, as she received the flowers from Stanhope. "And, oh! what lovely lilies! If I had not had my habit on, I would have gone in for them myself. How deliciously cool that native must be. I quite envy him."

"Chawmed to be of the slightest service," said the Honourable. "You must positively ask me to do something difficult next time. Heah we appeah to be at our journey's end."

By this time they had reached the old-time bungalow which belongs to the estate and gives its name to the place. A glorious residence in a hot climate. Pillared verandahs and balconies, stone floors, a high-walled courtyard with massive gates, the general plan and architecture most imposing.

It was evidently a mansion built in the good old times. There might even have been a little compulsory labour about it. The Dutch officials were sufficiently autocratic in those days. They knew how to build in a hot climate for comfort and coolness. The lines of their forts extend for miles. Even their store houses are mediæval-looking, castellated edifices.

Group after group now arrived. The air was filled with jest and merriment. Marguerite and Mrs. Baldhill, with Allerton, who was slightly fatigued, sat down upon a rock and gazed on the unequalled landscape. Around them were hills, forest-clothed, or dotted here and there with clearings. Vast rice meadows stretched on three sides, vividly green, and level as a lake of emerald, with a silver-threaded river meandering through. The broad stream which flowed beneath them boasted a wharf and walled-in cove, which attested to a bygone age of trade. They saw the coffee shrub, with its green berries, and picked the nutmeg, with its immature crimson-lipped mace. Native labourers in the out-buildings were chopping up tons of cocoa-nuts for the manufacture of oil.

Far in the distance rose the cloud-enfolded summit of Adam's Peak. They roamed about the glorious gardens, they lounged on the shady verandah of the old mansion, the whole livelong day, with the *abandon* of holiday-making children. Mr. Baldhill disregarded the landscape in great measure, but addressed himself to the question of luncheon with energy and decision. Two vans, deeply laden, were carefully unpacked, with the aid of a contingent of the stewards of the *Indus*, for that day only available. The results, when half-a-dozen impromptu tables, arranged on tressels, were laid, were brilliant, and altogether puzzling to the inexperienced British mind.

"How was it possible, my dear," inquired one of the lady passengers, "to get here in good order that lovely plate, the glass, the profusion of viands and wines of all kinds, and lastly the fish, the soup, the Parisian twenty-franc *bonbonnières* (of which every lady present was presented with one)? Mr. Baldhill must be a man of great taste."

"He's awfully rich, my dear," said the other lady; "they can buy taste, as well as most other things. His wife seems a nice, quiet, motherly sort of person. Possibly she may have something to do with this wonderful entertainment."

"I wonder how they will live in Australia when they

get home?" said the first lady. "They must find it a great change after this sort of business. I suppose everything is very rough there?"

"Not so much as you might think—in fact a good deal the other way. I was there for a year when Arthur was down on sick leave; it was cheaper than going to England. We were asked out a good deal up country, and were considerably astonished at the style they kept up and the substantial comfort of everything in 'the bush,' as they call it."

"Style! You can't mean it!"

"Well, I don't know if you think fine large houses with billiard-rooms, libraries, asphalte tennis courts, and lovely gardens count for anything. Troops of stabled horses, handsome carriages, very fair shooting, Arthur said, and the whole thing done with a most generous disregard of everything except the comfort of visitors."

"You amaze me. If it's as good as you say, and a fine climate into the bargain, I must make Sir Harry take me there next time we get our leave. England's too cold altogether. The last time I was there I got a cold in my chest which nearly finished me; but it seems to me as if the serious business of the day—the *déjeûner*, I mean—were about to commence."

Those who averred that the lunch at the great Wak-wallah picnic, given by the "Waler" of fabulous wealth, was the best thing of the sort ever known in Galle since the Dutch Burgomaster had celebrated the purchase of a cinnamon garden by an entertainment of classical completeness, were not far out. The riding and driving, the dry, fresh atmosphere, the change from recent imprisonment on board ship, had given the guests an entirely praiseworthy appetite. They did justice, therefore, to Mr. Baldhill's great joy and satisfaction, to the very carefully compiled banquet for the quality of which he stood sponsor.

Nothing could exceed his assuidity as host. He was ubiquitous and omnipresent. He appeared to divine instinctively the precise brand affected by those of his guests who were particular as to their wines; the delicacies precisely in season, the fish, flesh, and fowl,

the viands and fruit, which were then and there available.

As for the ladies, Mrs. Baldhill and Marie, with Isabel for a sort of flying column, managed to tempt even the most delicate and heat-oppressed among them to unwonted daring in the way of *entrées* and champagne. Whatever slight *gêne* and reserve there might have been at the commencement of the banquet, there was none at its close. The popping of champagne corks was not indeed more continuous than the fire of mirthful allusion, good stories, prompt repartee, and sudden confidences which characterised the later proceedings.

It was therefore thought to be a graceful recognition of the claims of their host to their high consideration when Sir Harry Gaveston, a distinguished Indian officer and the swell of the Indian party, proposed "the health of the gentleman to whom they were all indebted for so much enjoyment, for one of the pleasantest days he had ever experienced—a day to be marked with a white stone, as Horace averred, or was it Catullus? His classical memory was still serviceable, but most strangely either the sea air or that last superb bottle of claret had temporarily obscured the origin of the quotation. As a great Australian proprietor, those who, like himself, occasionally sought the genial climate of the south for hygienic reasons were frequently brought into contact with the country gentlemen of the land. He could say from experience that their host that day was a type and exemplar—a most worthy one—of the boundless hospitality and generous scale of entertainment which proverbially characterised Australia. For the ladies of the family, who had so gracefully and genially done their part, they would understand the depth of his feelings, though he would not trust himself to say much; but they would all remember their amiable hostess and her accomplished friends, together with one of the heroines of the nineteenth century, who had almost sealed with her blood her devotion to a brother officer and one of England's foremost sons—he alluded to General Gordon, now beleaguered at Khartoum, and for all they knew, in sore strait and need. Whenever the news of the success and deserved triumph of this hero

arrived they knew who would be the most sincere of sympathisers, and in their hearts the names of Miss Isabel Baldhill and General Gordon would ever be closely associated." (Loud and continuous cheering.)

Mr. Baldhill rose at once, and said heartily and forcibly that "he never was more pleased in his life than to see so many friends around him, enjoying themselves, he hoped and trusted. In his own country he had many friends, he believed—some of them very old, tried, and proved. He believed he appreciated them; but when he could not get old friends, he was always glad to surround himself with new ones, as on the present occasion. He trusted to see many of those now present at his own place in his native land, in Australia, where, though the country might not be always up to the mark in point of scenery and so on, they would receive a hearty welcome, and perhaps find that, in a general way, Australians know how to live. At any rate, they were always glad and proud to see their friends, and nearly always, he thought, contrived to amuse them. In the name of his wife and daughter, and the good friends who had shown themselves so true in the dangers they had shared together, he thanked them warmly and heartily for the way in which they had responded to Sir Harry Gaveston's very kind remarks."

Mr. Baldhill was much more fluent than he had been known to be on any previous festal occasion, and, indeed, impressed his wife with the idea that he was preparing for a Parliamentary campaign and a political career with reference to the land question on his return. But he evidently rose to the occasion, and possibly a glass or two of the very excellent dry champagne which he had provided, among other desirable tipple, may have aided his eloquence. Anyhow, his deliverance was highly approved of, and he was referred to by the younger members of this gathering as "a regular first-class, jolly old bird, and not half a bad hand at a speech."

A time of careless freedom followed; in groups and smaller divisions still. The enfranchised guests bestowed themselves in such nooks and corners as best suited their views, whether for smoking, general conversation, or more personal and private discussions

chiefly interesting to those immediately concerned. Coffee—such coffee as is only remembered in dreams—was served as the afternoon glided past; and with sunset the satiated revellers betook themselves along the homeward road.

The shadows lengthened apace. The forest awoke with her tribes of manifold life to revel in that season of joy in the tropics—the thrice-loved eve. The landscape had lost the brilliant hues of early morn as they rode homeward along the winding forest-embowered path; but the softer tints of the eventide, which deepened and blended without effacing the gorgeous masses of colour that overspread sea and sky, were more in accordance with the mood of subdued joy which had succeeded with Isabel—that of joy unconfined.

She sat on her horse dreamy and pre-occupied, as with the delicious ease and elasticity of his race Zohrab swept swiftly onward, like flowing water, as she always averred. The girl seemed lost in a reverie, which the gay badinage of her cavalier was powerless to dispel.

"How strange a thing real, absolute, undeniable pleasure seems when you come to think of it," she said at length, after a protracted silence, which bore hard upon the most successful *causeur* of his regiment. "This day has been made up of it, 'if we never have another,' as I heard a shearer say once. All of us have been so miserable lately, too, it makes one wonder when the next misfortune will arrive."

"Don't pay to take that view of life," said the light cavalry cornet.

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Bruce Allerton sat on the hotel balcony smoking long after the party had finally broken up. Marie and Isabel had lingered, but they, too, had disappeared. As for Marguerite, a reactionary meditation engrossed her, in which the events of her past life, the expectations of her future lot, were strangely intermingled.

Soon would she be in the strange new land of which she had heard so much. What was to be her occupation? What her career? Was she to fill up her life with completing Isabel's musical education and directing her reading? And when the girl married—as was

highly probable—nay, certain—what was to become of her? Was she to continue to be an integral permanent portion of the Baldhill household for an indefinite period? She looked forth upon the night. All was still but the plashing of the waves in the moonlit bay, the whispering murmur of the cocoa palms and serara trees, as the faint breeze stirred their slumbering leaves. The stars glowed with almost magical brilliance to her excited vision—large, lambent, lustrous—in the dark blue heaven. The low, confused hum from the thickly-crowded suburbs came faint and more faintly still to the ear. The lights glimmered in the silent bay. Hushed, calm, strangely beauteous were all things—glorious and overpowering to the senses with the unearthly splendour of tropical night.

At this mystical, fateful moment a voice fell upon her ear, low and deep, yet tender with the deep earnestness of the strongest passion which thrills mortality.

"Mrs. Mortimer—Marguerite, listen to me. We are alone. I have much to say to you. At least grant me a hearing, and do not speak until I have told you what my heart has long repeated."

She turned now, and saw Bruce Allerton, who had been sitting near her and Isabel when they last spoke. She had hardly noticed that they were alone, and had taken it for granted that her companion was indulging one of the moods of silence which had often come upon him of late, and which the intimacy of their companionship had come to permit without remark.

"Listen to me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand. "You will let me call you so—will you not?—while I tell you of a love as deep and passionate as ever burned in mortal breast."

She gazed at him like one in a dream, and neither by word nor movement made answer to his appeal. Her surprise was so great that she felt herself for the time incapable of words or volition.

Strange though it might appear, she had been so wrapped in her own misfortunes that she had never for one moment imagined that he entertained for her any feeling warmer than that of friendship—a sentiment which, indeed, in its best and purest sense, she was

strongly conscious of feeling for him. The suddenness of his confession, in the midst of her long-indulged reverie, confused and almost stunned her. The veil which he had lifted from his inmost feelings—a matter on which she had found him the most reticent of men—had revealed so unexpected and startling a disclosure.

But, with the lightning flash of exalted intuition, she saw other things spread out before her mental vision which, never before apparent, arose now with a clearness of outline, with a depth of light and shadow, which amazed and terrified her.

CHAPTER XLII

THE questions which had disturbed her mind, which she had with half-acknowledged volition asked her heart during her hour of introspective thought, returned with clamorous persistency. The circumstances of her former life as they arose before her from the troubled past seemed strangely inappropriate to her changed entity, as if they had belonged of right to another woman—to a wholly different individual.

And *was* she the same woman as she sat here in the charmed farewell night of her sojourn in this wondrous summer land? Was not that other woman dead in law? Sentenced to deprivation of all her rights, civil and personal, of home and hearth, husband and children, position and friends—ay, even of her very name? Had not he, the lover of her youth, the husband of her womanhood, the father of her children, been by an apparent refinement of cruelty selected as the unconscious instrument by whom the sentence had been carried out—forced to be the chief agent in reducing her to this desolate state of sorrow and forlornness? Was she alone (she asked herself) compelled to abide by the oath, so long forsworn—the vow which years since had been broken? Was she to immolate herself,

still living, like some poor Hindoo widow, upon the corpse of that dead and gone marriage ceremony?

Still living! Yes, still living! Ah, heaven! did she not know that never before in her life's history had her pulses throbbed with fuller consciousness of vigour than at this moment, when the voice of him who offered her the priceless wealth of a true man's love sounded in her ear! The absolute alteration of scene, the complete transformation of every thought, habit, and motive of her former life, had worked a magical change in her inmost being. The balmy air of the Orient, in which sense and spirit alike bathed, as in a newly-created atmosphere, seemed to have rejuvenated her every faculty. Her step was lighter, her head more proudly erect; her air and carriage more closely recalled to herself the days of her lost youth than she could have conceived possible—than any one could have dreamed who beheld her in the first years of her agony and despair.

She could not deceive herself. An instinctive reply cried aloud within her. She could have responded in this new land, among these unknown people, to the accents of tenderness, to the love of a husband, to the daily duties and honours of a wife, even as a sorrow-stained soul, escaping from the sins of earth, might shine in rehabilitated splendour in some brighter world, placed far amid the glorified immensities of space.

As these thoughts passed through her mind, with her face turned to the soft, shimmering wavelets of the harbour bay beneath them, the voice of Bruce Allerton, low and pleading, fell softly and with almost rhythmical cadence as it mingled with the sighs of the serara trees. It was an hour rich in accessories of love—moonlight, silence, the breath of flowers, and the hush of night. All things went to influence the listener with strange and increasing force towards that answer so often given—the assent which marks the surrender of woman's reasoning to man's passionate pleading, the capitulation of the *châtelaine* betrayed by the treacherous promptings of her own heart. Gradually, though unheeded, after the first few startling accents, Bruce Allerton's words became clear and resonant in her listening ear, while he told how "he had, from their first meeting, recognised

in her an allied soul, a kindred spirit; how he had divined easily that she was not what she seemed, that her social position had been, ah! so different. He knew, he could perceive, that a mystery enveloped her career. But he denied, from careful study of her every word and action, that aught save honour and purity could ever have been attached to her name. He was willing to take the risk; he defied all uncertainty as to her antecedents, if she would make him that unspeakably happy mortal which a word from her lips would do. He was willing to remain patient until she unravelled the mystery at her pleasure. Long had he waited and wandered for his soul's ideal. Till now he had never looked upon that combination of intellect and grace, of beauty and high-souled distinction of character, to which, from his boyhood, he had vowed fealty. He owed to her the exaltation of his ideal of womanhood—of faith in her mission to purify, to ennoble, to save the ruder sex; he owed to her half a year of companionship which had made their adventurous journeying a veritable Elysium; finally, to her care and unselfish devotion he owed his life. 'That life, Marguerite, oh! my love,' he said, 'I now dedicate to you. But one word—one only—to say that you do not scorn the offering.'"

In his concluding accents there was a tone of tenderness and passion which, in that hour and place, it was hard for any daughter of Eve to resist; he moved his arm as if to draw her towards him. The slight action seemed to arouse her half-dormant faculties, as with a sudden movement she disengaged herself and stood before him.

Waving her hand with a slight but imperious gesture of command, she repressed his intention of approaching her as effectually as by speech, and gazing at him with an air of melancholy reproach, attempted to speak. Her voice failed her—

> "The imperfect note
> Was choked within her swelling throat."

Then, "I have been thinking,"—she faltered at length—"oh! so deeply, since you first spoke. I had

long relinquished all thoughts of love and marriage, there is no coquetry therefore in my declaring that I never dreamt of awakening such sentiments in your heart. I will not, cannot deny my strong, yes, tender friendship for you. I shall always feel pride in your success. While life lasts your joys and sorrows will never lack one sympathiser, and there are circumstances —there might even have been such now—when the offer you have honoured me by making would have been welcome, would have been dear to my heart. But now, do not mistake me, I implore you, for having once arrived at this resolution I am changeless as death. These circumstances for me—for us, I will say —do not, can never exist."

"Then you give me hope; if there be a contingency, a chance, even the most remote, I will wait for you—for ever—if you but bid me hope," he replied.

"No! no! do not cheat yourself with a vain illusion. There is no hope, there can be none, none in this world. Even if the course of events were swayed, if what is unlikely, impossible, should happen, I feel now, though I have wavered, I confess, that I could never be yours."

"But will you not explain? Oh! Marguerite, my life, my destiny, will you not take counsel with me about what so nearly concerns our happiness? Is the bar to our union insurmountable? It must be no mortal obstacle, if my devotion—my despair—cannot overcome it."

"No, no! I must not say. I cannot explain. Look upon me as dead to the world. I may speak, may wear the appearance of a living woman, but I am not permitted to act like one. Look upon me rather as one of those creations of the poet's fancy—the vampire, the lamia—who is granted power to disturb the souls of men, to awaken love, to excite hopes which she is compelled by an inflexible fate to destroy."

Here Marguerite raised her eyes to Heaven, as if in mute appeal against the stern destiny beneath which her life had so long remained prostrate, and wringing her hands burst into a tempest of tears—a wild passion of sobbing which he who witnessed it could never have

imagined possible from the calm, graceful, self-restrained Mrs. Mortimer.

He would have consoled her, would have whispered assurances that they were in an intellectual age, the arbiters of their own destinies, the disposers of their own happiness. Why, all innocent and unconscious of evil, should they devote themselves to lifelong misery, at the mandate of outworn and narrow superstition?

"Oh! do not speak so, Bruce Allerton," she replied, and her voice had the tone of winning entreaty which had so often charmed him. "Do not you join the band of scoffers, nor tempt a weak woman in her hour of danger to consent to what every lesson of her youth, every principle of her womanhood, teaches to be false and demoralising. Could you endure to see me, could I myself bear to support existence daily, hourly, conscious as I should be of degradation and despair? No! while *he* lives to whom I vowed every thought of my heart, every faculty of my being, I can never entertain the thought of another's love. You have my secret in part. You can divine the torturing doubts, the deadly struggles. But, no! I am fixed in my resolve. My path is that of duty, clear and unswerving. Like yonder moon, as she glides through heaven's fields, passing through cloud and mist but to shine in serene, undimmed splendour, so must the soul of Marguerite Mortimer pursue its course on earth below, pure and unsullied by the gusts of passion, the shadows of remorse. And now, farewell! This subject must never be reopened between us. We are friends, are we not? Yes, and more than friends. May we never have cause to lose confidence in each other's truth and honour."

She gazed on him for one moment with a bright sorrowful glance, such as he told himself could come upon the face of no mortal woman that he had ever known,—then passed before him with her swift gliding step, as of an apparition, disappearing through one of the open doors of the balcony which led to the inner apartments.

So sudden and noiseless was her departure that Bruce Allerton gazed vacantly after her retreating form, as

though he were watching the evanishing of a being from another world. He looked around with an air of half-surprise, then sank exhausted upon his couch.

. . . . . .

Next morning was devoted to the service of one of the deities in the British Pantheon, the great god Bustle. Mr. Baldhill, an invariably early riser, secured certain advantages of embarkation by a daylight commencement, and was therefore enabled to instal (literally) Isabel's horses and other live stock on board the *Indus*, as well as to secure undivided attention to the baggage of the party before the majority of the Australian passengers had left their beds. He wore, therefore, a serenely virtuous countenance at breakfast, as of a man who had "broken the neck" of his day's work. He was so fully occupied, in fact, by his feelings of self-gratulation, to which he more than once alluded, that he omitted to remark till nearly the close of the repast the somewhat silent and abstracted air of the other usually talkative performers.

"Why, Bruce!" he said at length, "you've regularly knocked yourself up over that Wak-wallah spree—don't look half the man you did yesterday morning. You must lie up aboard ship, or you'll not be very fit when we sight the South Head lighthouse. Mrs. Mortimer's tired herself out looking after you—seems to me—and Isabel too. Why, pussy, what's come over the lot of ye? You're not sorry to leave this hot hole of a place, surely to goodness?"

"Weaction after the wild wevelwy of Wak-wallah," said the Honourable Bertie, coming adroitly to the rescue, as he perceived a certain awkwardness on the part of the persons alluded to. "Wegulahly welaxed myself—haven't a word to thwow to a dog. Jack, old man, didn't you expwess yourself to the same effect this morning?"

"Parting with all our Indian friends," said Sir John, taking the cue extended to him. "Miss Isabel's half-score of admirers feel much worse, no doubt; I'm regretting that cheerful widow from Kurrachee, and Bertie was nearly making up his mind (a great thing for him) about that tall girl from Madras. Allerton, old

fellow, you'll promise to go to no more picnics till we get to Sydney?"

"Somebody told us there was news of the fall of Khartoum," said Isabel. "Captain Vyner says it's only a *canard*, but it has an ominous sound; that's what I'm mourning about. Only suppose it is true for one moment, and Gordon in the hands of the enemy! I feel as if I should never have another happy moment."

"We have heard so many of these reports," said Marguerite, forcing herself to join in the conversation. "I begin to fear that this relief expedition may be too late. Still, as long as it is unconfirmed, we must hope everything from his consummate generalship and the good fortune which has hitherto attended him."

"Luck is a bridge which breaks down sometimes," said Marie. "Even Napoleon the First found his Moscow. But surely *le bon Dieu* will preserve General Gordon. He is *le chevalier* Bayard of the age *sans peur et sans reproche.*"

"We shall hear by telegram at King George's Sound," said Mrs. Baldhill. "Very likely he'll get through somehow. If he thought as much of that country as I do, when he came away the first time he'd never have gone back. And now, don't let us forget that the steamer starts at ten o'clock sharp, and there's a deal to be done before then."

This practical announcement brought the chief part of the audience back from the realm of the abstract to the concrete necessities of life. Sir John Danvers and the Honourable Bertie disappeared in search of their portmanteaux. Marie and Isabel followed Mrs. Baldhill meekly, as recognising that their hour had come. Marguerite had excused herself at the first mention of the steamer's sailing hour, while Mr. Baldhill lighted a cigar and looked around with an air of superior wisdom.

"I've got all your traps, Bruce, except what you'll want in your cabin," he said, "safe and sound in the after-hold, along with mine. The horses are eating their barley in their boxes, and Isabel's deer and spotted sheep—confound them!—are snug and comfortable in a

big crockery crate. 'An early start makes easy stages,' as Sam Slick says."

"Thank you, my good old friend," said Allerton; "I really don't feel as if I'd the energy to have done it for myself. My traps might have stayed behind and been divided among the hotel waiters, as far as I'm concerned. I suppose they will cart us down altogether. Take care I'm not left behind myself, for I'm really not up to much this morning."

"It's that blessed picnic," said Mr. Baldhill. "It's taken too much out of you. I thought you were stronger than you seem. But we must tell off Mrs. Mortimer to take charge of you to-day. Splendid woman that! She's always to be depended upon when there's any good to be done. I'll tell her to look you up. I don't know what you'd have done without her."

Mr. Baldhill thereupon departed with an air of increased self-satisfaction upon his good-humoured countenance, evidently pluming himself upon having hit the right nail on the head, and provided for his friend an ally and supporter of the most unexceptionable description.

Bruce Allerton threw himself back upon the cane lounge he had adopted with a groan that came from the bottom of his heart. "Which was the sorer, the first word or the last?" he said to himself. "Why did not the Arab spear strike deeper?"

It was well for Bruce Allerton that he was not committed to the tender mercies of any of his feminine guardians except the one allotted to him by Mr. Baldhill, but, as he sadly reflected, denied to him by fate. The other ladies, frankly good-humoured and attentive to his wants on ordinary occasions, were on this eventful morn strictly unavailable.

Mrs. Baldhill, after counting and recounting all the trunks, bags, parcels, and wraps that were to be deposited in her cabin, together with an ample supply of fresh fruit for the voyage, became firmly convinced that her dressing-case, containing jewellery and valuables, was missing, and declined to leave the hotel until it was produced. As it was eventually routed out from the lower strata of a mountain of luggage deposited in a

waggonette, the search was protracted, and the chance of boarding the steamer in time appreciably lessened.

As for Isabel, she was engaged in a spirited personal controversy with several native jewellers and sellers of curios up to the very last moment. She had loaded Marie besides with pale yellow tortoise-shell bracelets, cats'-eyes, turquoises, and amethysts, including one large rose-diamond (a second Koh-i-Noor), for which she gave three pounds on the personal guarantee of the merchant that it was of the first water; so that the little Frenchwoman was utterly distracted between anxiety about the valuables and terror at the loud voices and frantic features of the bargainers. She had temporarily forgotten the existence of Allerton.

That luckless invalid had, between the over-excitement, the fatigues of the excursion, and his shattered hopes, indeed suffered a dangerous relapse. The recurrent pains caused him to imagine that internal hemorrhage had set in—that probably his last hour had come. Not that he dreaded the summons. He rather welcomed the idea as an easy means of escape from the burden of an existence which had of late been painful and wearisome, and which was now become utterly distasteful. Still, as he lay unnerved, weak, and half-fainting upon the couch, realising that the rest of the party were carrying out their plan for embarkation and strictly protecting their own interests without reference to him, he smiled bitterly as he choked back the feeling of desertion and neglect.

"I can enter into Lord Marmion's state of mind," he thought to himself, "and gauge that unscrupulous nobleman's feelings with curious fidelity, though I don't know that I have any feudal or other claim to particular attention; not indeed that it matters," and he hummed in a low tone—

> "And half he murmured, 'Is there none
> Of all my halls have nursed,
> Page, squire, or groom, one cup to bring
> Of blessed water from the spring,
> To slake my dying thirst?'"

"Dying thirst; not a bad idea. I wonder if I could

ring the bell? I should like a glass of lemonade. Oh! It's you, Mrs. Mortimer. I thought you were all on board by this time."

"And left you behind! Surely you did not think that?" And here, as she noted his fatigued and haggard expression, her manner gained an indescribable softness, and her eyes filled with tears. "It was certainly unkind to leave you all alone, and so long; but Mrs. Baldhill delayed us all, and I have had to see about a carriage for you myself. Mr. Baldhill was carried off to the steamer. There is no time to spare; but everything is ready for you."

"You are my good angel," he said; "but it would be better far if you all went on without me. Mrs. Baldhill will take care of my luggage—it is not very valuable—till I come on."

"So you are going to lie down and die because you have suffered the first disappointment of your life?" she said, bending over him, and re-arranging the pillows under his throbbing head. "How hardly used men consider themselves to be when they have to suffer a tithe of what every woman bears uncomplainingly. If you wish me to preserve the respect I have always felt for you, Mr. Allerton, you will shake off this unmanly weakness and accompany me to your carriage. We must land you in Australia restored to health of body and mind. And here, in good time, comes Isabel. I know her step."

In good sooth it was that spirited damsel, who, ascending several stairs at a time, burst into the room with characteristic impetuosity.

"Why, what's all this?" she exclaimed. "Nearly lost your passage—all our passages! I took it for granted you were on board, and then found you'd never turned up. Thought you'd run away with Mrs. Mortimer. I did indeed. Gone to Kandy or Colombo. So I came back in spite of mother and father; defied the captain and all his officers. Now, no more words; we can't perform the play of *Hamlet* without the Prince. So come along, your Royal Highness."

And here the direct and practical young person leaned over and raised up the invalid by the simple application

of her strong right arm to his waist. "Mrs. Mortimer," she said, "you help to support him on the other side. I think, Master Bruce, you can manage to walk with our help downstairs, unless you want us to carry you. We could do that, at a pinch, too, I dare say."

The sick man smiled feebly, and bracing himself for the effort, walked in a feeble fashion between the two fair supporters until he reached the carriage, which entering he lay back in a very fair imitation of a fainting fit. The passage through the air revived him somewhat. They were rapidly driven to the shore, where a swift, broad-sailed outrigger canoe received them, in the stern of which sat Mr. Baldhill, anxious and impatient of mien. Arrived at the *Indus*' side, they were hurriedly assisted up the gangway; in less than five minutes the great steamer left her ground, the captain's stern voice was heard to pronounce the words "full speed," and Bruce Allerton was again on his way to his native land.

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Once more on blue water, the passengers settled down to their new positions and unaccustomed cabins. All the Indians had departed. The Australian and New Zealand contingents were necessarily few in comparison. There was a forlorn and dejected look about things generally which Isabel, with her usual freedom of criticism, did not fail to remark.

"I'm afraid we have lost our aristocratic admixture; our social flavour suffers in consequence," she said on the third morning, when, Allerton being considerably renovated and able to sit up, they were all congregated after breakfast on deck in various conversational positions. "Of course, I'm truly thankful to you, Sir John, and Mr. Stanhope; but I can't help thinking we look rather provincial. I notice we've fallen off in our conversation. There's no singing in the evenings; and we're all disposed to think our own thoughts and be unsocial. All this must be changed."

"We don't expect anything; we're going to Australia," said Sir John. "Bertie and I are ready to take the rough with the smooth. So we intend to be cheerful. Don't we, Bertie? But we *have* remarked

that a tinge of melancholy pervades the atmosphere. I attributed it chiefly to Allerton's relapse, poor old chappie; but there were some nice people among those Indians."

"Nice! I should think so," said Isabel. "Not to mention that beautiful Mrs. Alvanley, whom you admired so, Sir John. I quite lost my heart to that charming Captain Yorke Northington, the Bengal Cavalry man with the heavy moustache. He was so clever, amusing, and distinguished-looking, so interested in my reading too. There was something very enjoyable in his society, until the doctor said something about his wife being such a sweet woman, and that they'd only been married six months. It was a shock to me, I can tell you. Don't you think he ought to have told me at first?"

"Most careless of him," said Danvers; "very reprehensible indeed. I think there ought to be a list of passengers hung up in the saloon, correct card, weight for age, and all that, column for married and single, widowers, and so on—any leading information which might be useful, in fact, about every one, male or female. Why should we be in danger of bestowing our young affections unsuitably, or under wrong impressions?"

"Why, indeed?" said Isabel. "I might have done myself a lasting injury, all for the want of a little private information. If Bruce had been well, I'd have made him get it for me. It's been a dreadful loss to me, the poor fellow's being so ill; but he's better now—are you not, poor old Bruce?"

"I do feel better, but you're not to 'poor dear' me, Miss Isabel Baldhill, as you girls say, any more. I'm extremely grateful to you for all your kindness, but I decline to be exhibited as an object of compassion. Perhaps you'll remember that."

"Poor—fellow, I was going to say, but I beg your pardon, Mr. Bruce Allerton. I perceive by your being so cross that you're improving rapidly, upon which receive my sincere congratulations."

CHAPTER XLIII

EASTERLY winds dead in the teeth of the *Indus* had prevailed for the last week. An unchanging gale had seemed to have persecuted the ship from 8° south latitude. The captain passed his life in looking to windward, as if hoping to see a favourable bank of clouds, denoting a shift of wind. But none came. Then down went the barometer—down—down—until it appeared by its exceptional depression to justify a hurricane, a contingency upon which several experienced passengers of desponding temperament remarked in so many words.

"Rather an eerie thing this undefined expectation," said Isabel; "and yet, I don't know, a real good storm, that would show what the *Indus* was made of, would be something worth seeing."

"There is something terrible in 'the horror of a great tempest' settling down upon one," answered Marguerite, as they stood on the deck long after their usual hour of retiring, watching the limitless and sombre ocean waste, the "dim, desolate deep" heaving and foaming around them under the midnight sky. As far as eye could reach was that wondrous plain, now lashed and tortured into an upheaval phenomenal and menacing. The phosphoric light dimly revealed abysses which seemed yawning even to the recesses of that fathomless deep, while again the crest of the mountainous wave glimmered as if poised high on an alpine steep, to be lost the next moment in pitchy darkness. As the gale increased, with the weird shrieking, like an evil spirit, through every stick and shroud, one of the lady passengers hurriedly inquired whether there was any danger.

"None whatever, my dear madam," said the captain, smiling urbanely, "as long as the *Indus* holds together; and very great care was taken in building her. She will mind a gale like this no more than a waterman's boat does a tide ripple."

"But suppose anything should happen; fire, or a

leak, or anything of that kind," said the fair cross-questioner; "what would become of us then?"

"In such case, no doubt," admitted the Captain, "life might be sacrificed; but these disasters are improbable, and we are all in the hands of Providence; even on land, you know, accidents happen."

"Oh, yes! but it seems so much safer on land. The least little thing may go wrong at sea, and you can't get out and walk; on shore——"

"We have our boats," said the Captain, "and though they are inconvenient, many thousand miles have been safely voyaged in that way. But I must go forward; and in the meantime" (here the good ship *Indus* appeared to rear straight up, and gave a most awful pitch, while the screw revolved in air ominously) "I would suggest to you ladies to go to bed."

"Oh! but this is the time and the night that we expect to make the Cape Otway light," said Isabel. "I positively can't go to bed while there's any uncertainty about our seeing our dear old Australian beacon. Come, Mr. Allerton, you're pretty well now, thank goodness! Won't you back me up in my patriotic resolve?"

"When Prudence says one thing and the caprice of the hour another," replied Allerton, who, muffled in a portentous overcoat, was peering into the eye of the blast, "I know which will win. I really think, Miss Baldhill, that we might, as Australians, exhibit a little sentiment on this occasion. The first officer said it couldn't be long now, so I vote we sit up and confront the Otway and its dioptric light."

"Strange that science should enable this great ship," said Marguerite, "to run fearlessly towards a wild coast through storm and darkness."

"There is something awful about it," said Isabel, "but terribly fascinating. What do you say, Sir John? Shall we walk forward and stand near the look-out? I wonder which of us will see the light first, and which would win it if we made a bet on it?"

"Capital idea," said Sir John; "guinea sweepstakes, to be won by the first that sights it. We'll walk forward and see the fun for ourselves."

The night had grown wilder as they went forward,

beside the drenched and silent sailor who stood at watch, calm and collected, amid the shrill cry of the shrieking wind, the hoarse growling, the hissing wave-voices.

"Do not the waves put you in mind of a horde of Malay pirates?" said Isabel, gazing over the side of the vessel, as she plunged heavily with each revolution of the screw against the water-demons that threatened to engulf her. "They dash at the throat of the poor ship, that groans and trembles in every plank. Then they seem to be boarding her with a swarming rush, as they leap over and around and down gunwale and deck and hatch, then fall struggling, shrieking, clinging, back into the deep over bow and side."

"Bravo, Miss Isabel," said Sir John; "a most life-like, yet imaginative description. Nothing more grand in its way than what we are looking upon now. The gale is rising, too; hope we're not going to have a sensational blow—the tale-end of a cyclone; but it looks very like it. That would be worse than all."

"I don't know that I find the night below when one lies awake in this provoking head-windy weather, more weird and dismal than a downright gale," continued Isabel, whose romantic mood was now exerted to an unusual degree. "When you lie awake hour after hour the noises are dreadful. The dashing waters swish and gurgle close to your ear; the engine clanks with a sad, mechanical swing, like a galley slave; the Lascars, jabbering as they run, every now and then raise a wild cry, as if the ship were going down; the stern voice of the officer of the watch—everything tends to magnify these vast and awful nature-forces. One feels in a world of giants, that might crush one if only a foot from our course. Oh! there it is! and see!" with a shriek of delight the girl pointed to a glimmering speck of fire, hardly distinguishable from a star in the far horizon.

Almost at the same moment the look-out man growled hoarsely out in the deep tones which a sea life seems to produce, "Otway light, sir, on the weather beam, bearing sou'-sou'-east."

The girl's piercing vision had descried the beacon even before the practised eye of the seaman; and great was

the congratulation and triumph in consequence. The pool, which represented something over ten guineas, was handed over to her, and everybody vied in eulogising her sight, which had descried the beacon even before any of the officers or seamen on board.

It was a quarter of an hour after midnight when the Cape Otway light was sighted, and the captain had indicated ten to twenty minutes after twelve as the time when the lighthouse might be expected to come into view. He was not sorry to have his reckonings so accurately verified, and was evidently easier in mind, running as he was end on to the coast at the rate of fourteen knots an hour.

In despite of the waves, and the ebon terrors of the sky, no particular cyclone or special storm-blast developed itself. A long rolling swell alone told of the recent disturbances of the ocean. They learned, however, that there had been a terrific gale, such as had not been known for many years.

But it was a golden dawn which found them steaming through those vast sandstone portals, the Sydney Heads —soft, clear, opaline as a painter's dream. The towering araucarias were ranked on the elevations around the harbour as if sentinels posted to guard that hitherto inviolate haven. A Turneresque haze slightly softened without confusing the outlines of sea and shore, the flower-crowned promontories, the fair, pale-hued pillared mansions. Early as was the hour, the calm, deep harbour bays were alive with boats and vessels of all classes. Gliding yachts swept by, broad-winged with outspread sails, tug-steamers with outward bound vessels behind them were straining and puffing towards the entrance through which they had lately passed. On all sides was unfolded a marvel of beauty—a nature picture heightened by art. It was a maritime stronghold of Britain replete with the luxuries of the race—a community thriving, enterprising, prosperous, knowing little of want, scarcity, or poverty but the names.

"What a wonderful place to be at the very end of the world," said Marguerite. "It seems another England, with a kind of semi-tropical flavour. The ships, the boats, the population are all English; but

the brightness of the sky, the clearness of the air, the gaiety and vivacity which pervades everything, these are different."

"Wait till you see the shops, Mrs. Mortimer," said Mrs. Baldhill. "They're English, if anything is; and I'm sure we shall want a week's steady buying before we are fit to be seen. I suppose the carriage will be there to meet us; that will be one comfort, as we telegraphed to Mason from Adelaide, and got an answer. If not, there are plenty of cabs."

"Cabs!" echoed the Honourable Bertie, faintly; "I call that distwessing, wegulah imposition. Heah we twavel all wound the world, expecting a new countwy with boundless fweedom of action, and we ah met on the vewy shoah, the stwand of a new hemispheah—if I may so expwess it—with cabs!"

"Never mind, Mr. Stanhope," said Isabel, "don't despair yet. Wait till we get to Merradoolah; we'll show you something new and strange—won't we, Mr. Allerton? And now, you're all well and strong again—by the bye, we ought to have the prayers of the congregation requested at St. James's as a sort of thanksgiving, you know. Oh, no! it's only when people are likely to die that they do that."

"I hope you won't encourage her in any more wild ways, Mr. Allerton," said the old lady, anxiously. "Now that we've got home and among our friends and civilised people, Isabel, I shall expect you to behave like any other well-brought-up girl."

"Oh! I couldn't do that, mother," said the unconventional damsel, pleadingly. "Think what quantities there are of them, and all so painfully alike. But I'll promise to keep closely to the schoolroom, and let Mrs. Mortimer work me up in music and drawing, and all sorts of things that we've rather dropped lately. Then I've got my book to write; we mustn't forget '*The Battle of the Nile*,' you know. Oh! we shall be so happy, I'm sure, and then when I've been good for a couple of months or so we must all go up to Merradoolah. Now we're within sight of George-street, safe and sound, too, life will be full of happiness, I foresee."

"Well, here we are at the wharf," said Mr. Baldhill. "I see Mason and the carriage all right, the horses looking grand, too. What a size they are after those little cats of Arabs! Now, keep cool and collected; there's always a rush at landing, and we've got such heaps of things to take care of besides the heavy luggage. I see Mason has brought William with him, so he can stop and see your horses landed, Isabel, and show Gholab the way to Orara. Bruce, of course you'll take these gentlemen to the Club. All of you come up and dine at eight, and we can have a quiet talk over things. Ah! there's Marie's husband; regular little Frenchman, ain't he? He must have thought she was lost. Never mind, Marry, 'all's well that ends well,' isn't it?"

Marie—"Alphonse, *mon ange—mon ange!*"

. . . . . .

Home at last! A home strong in the security, solitude, and independence of British habitudes, sweet with the feeling of absolute control, and rich in those material comforts and allowable luxuries which wealth provides.

It was a peaceful pleasure for Isabel and Marguerite to ramble through the handsome rooms of the noble mansion in which a certain expansiveness of style had been sedulously studied; to sit on the wide verandah in the moonlight, and hear the surges on the beach beneath, to mark the lines of brilliant light which were broken by masses of foliage, or absorbed by thickets of strangely brilliant flowers. Mr. Baldhill spent his days in the city, at club or bank, or where merchants most do congregate, and thus was enabled to receive recent information about his various properties and investments.

Allerton and the English friends explored Sydney socially and geographically to their hearts' content; but either at dinner-time or during the evening generally found their way to Orara. Here, souvenirs of the desert and the Great River formed a never-failing fund of mutually interesting conversation, while the sketches and travels in Sydney proper produced the usual amount of chaff and playful criticism.

Isabel fulfilled her promise, and during the day worked industriously at all branches of learning in which she felt herself to be deficient. She, indeed, displayed an ardour and enthusiasm which delighted her instructress. Marguerite had from the first experienced considerable difficulty in fixing her pupil's somewhat too easily attracted attention upon the work in hand. Now the latent energy of a strong temperament seemed to have asserted itself. The result was a remarkable advance in several distinct directions. With the exception of an early morning walk, and an afternoon ride upon the peerless Zohrab, Isabel Baldhill's days were devoted to genuine and unrelaxing study.

She resisted, with unusual firmness, the temptations to ordinary gaiety and social dissipations which would have interfered with her self-imposed task. She had become, almost immediately upon her arrival, a fashionable celebrity of no mean eminence. Her beauty, her intelligence, her *naïve* originality and daring, combined with the prestige derived from her father's wealth, would have secured her a leading place in colonial society under any circumstances. But when to these titles to distinction were added those of a rumour of adventurous Eastern travel; of the actual experience of a wound received in hand-to-hand encounter, wherein Bruce Allerton, the well-known squatter and country gentleman, was nearly killed; the whole emphasised and verified by the possession of Arab horses, slaves, and arms, with other trophies of conquest, the excitement about the heiress rose to a pitch altogether exceptional.

In the romantic interest which now surrounded all the members and intimates of the Baldhill family Marguerite fully shared. Her distinguished appearance, her stately manner, her accomplishments, and her attractiveness did not dispose the good people of Sydney to believe that she was "only Isabel Baldhill's governess." They, therefore, insisted upon constructing imaginative historiettes of her life and times, some of which probably came rather nearer the truth than the accepted version, in that they held it for self-evident

that she was perhaps a widow, but more probably separated from her husband under mysterious circumstances. As for Isabel, she was either engaged to Bruce Allerton, whose life she had saved in Egypt (very luckily for her, some of her contemporaries thought—they would have dared a little danger, if certain of being similarly rewarded), or else to one of the English travellers, one of whom was the son of an earl, and the other one of the richest country gentlemen in England. But the Baldhills were always a lucky family, and no one would wonder at anything they might arrive at. It was a pity, certainly, that poor Syd had died so young. If he had lived, Isabel would not have been the great heiress she was now; and all the better for her, too. For she was a little spoiled with her Arab horses, and her slaves and gazelles, and all that nonsense.

As for Mrs. Baldhill, her delight in finding herself once more on her native heath, the South Head-road, knew no bounds. She repeatedly asked Mr. Stanhope and Sir John Danvers whether they did not think people were very foolish to leave a home in a place like Sydney, where they had all the comforts and most of the luxuries of life.

These gentlemen were indeed so pleased with Sydney in general that they declared that no consideration should induce them to depart from Australia for years to come. "Capital yachting; famous club; most hospitable people; billiards, whist, ecarté, all to your hand; fish dinnahs, good cookewy; splendid climate; nevah cold; seldom damp." (The Honourable Bertie's chest had been throwing out danger signals for some months before he left England for the East.) "Pwetty girls and agweeable women in evewy house. Don't see the good of going away from such a place; do you, Jack?"

"Too much like England, that's the worst of it," said Sir John. "Barring a little more sun, we might as well stop in Mayfair, in order to acquire a knowledge of foreign parts and acquaint oneself with one's countrymen in Britain's most important colony."

In deference to this view of things, it was decided

finally that everybody was to "*desipere in loco*" for the next two or three months. By that time the pleasures of the metropolis would have begun to pall on the male portion of the party. Shearing was impending, wherefore it would be a seasonable time to visit Merradoolah in September, in which month Mr. Baldhill generally inspected his properties and overseers. He liked to see matters for himself. Latterly he had taken Isabel as a sort of travelling companion. Mr. Allerton's chief property, Jimburah, lay at no great distance from Merradoolah, so it was decided after much discussion and many pros and cons., that they should all start for this much quoted place, and spend the last quarter of the year in the peaceful enjoyment of country pleasures—Christmas to be passed there. Then, and not till then, would they essay again to inhale the ocean breeze, watch the mimic fleet at play on the waters of the bay, and ride under the swaying pines which sheltered the gardens of the City by the Sea.

So on a certain morning another call to arms took place, which, Mr. Stanhope and his friend averred, reminded them strongly of their Hegira, the flight from Egypt, only that Abdallah and his followers were absent. Isabel regretted this deeply, but Mrs. Baldhill considered the superior safety of the North-Western Railway line to be more than compensating for the absence of the romantic element.

"The country is as dry and sandy, as flat and as bare, in a dry season, as any of the desert. I know that," said the conservative matron. "But at any rate we can travel in peace without thinking of those wretches of Arabs. I declare the thought of them makes me quite miserable now."

"But I heard you had bushwangahs and blacks," said the Honourable Bertie. "Wather ugly customahs, I should weckon."

"Oh, bushrangers!" said Mrs. Baldhill; "they're nothing. There are never more than three or four of them at a time, and they only rob you. As for the poor blacks, there are very few of them—like the snakes—and the chances are very much against your dropping across them."

Gholab and Zohrab and Zuleika were duly put into the train, to the surprise and amazement of the former, who had never before travelled in the fire carriage of the Giaour. Also the spotted sheep and the gazelles, henceforth to be located permanently at Merradoolah. A crowd had assembled at the station, and when Ayesha followed her mistress arrayed in yashmak and saree the interest became intense.

Growing fast, and developing with the rapid maturity of her race and clime, the slender child was fast changing into a striking-looking woman, her great starlike eyes, slight rounded figure, and clear-cut features forming an Oriental type of beauty decidedly novel in this altogether British community. No persuasion, however, could induce her to leave her mistress.

"She gave me my life," she would repeat. "It belongs to her in the future. She may do as she thinks fit with it. Who am I to run against the will of God? He has willed it, or I should never have crossed the black water. It is my fate. I am a Christian, and I can serve Him as well here. It may be better than near my childhood's home."

A day and a night found them at the terminus of the railway, whence they were to drive to Merradoolah. The route had not been wholly devoid of interest. Emu and kangaroo had they seen flying wildly out of the track of the iron horse. Strange birds had risen from the pools and watercourses as they passed. Immense flocks of sheep had retreated with but moderate haste from before them. Wild horses and cattle in herds had crossed the waste.

Their spirits were high; and when the four-in-hand drag with a team of grand, highly-conditioned brown horses—which was to bear them to their destination came rattling into the station, and the Honourable Bertie was invited by Mr. Baldhill to take the reins, every one foresaw that the whole thing was to be triumphantly successful.

CHAPTER XLIV

"WHY, what's all this, govahnaw?" demanded that gentleman, as he assumed the ribbons with an air that showed long and intimate acquaintance with the mysteries of the coaching art. "Why inflict these tewiffic suppwises upon unoffending stwangahs? Why didn't you bweak it gently? Who would evah have thought to have encountahed a team and dwag like this in the wilds of Austwaliah? Blood, bone, bweeding, and matched to a hair? I should like to tool them on the opening day of the Faw-in-Hand Club."

"What was the good of gassing about 'em?" replied Mr. Baldhill calmly. "People say Australians are too fond of blowing as it is. I didn't want to sell them, though I've got more of the same sort coming on. But I like to sit behind the best nags I can turn out of my stud. And these aren't easy beat, either at home or abroad."

"I should think not," said Sir John. "You don't find a team like this in England every day—matched in colour, size, and action; sixteen hands too, if they are an inch. Of course they're all of one strain of blood?"

"Sixteen one, or a trifle over," declared Mr. Baldhill, with conscious pride and exactitude. "Half-brothers, all of them. Sons of Brown Ben (imported), and he was a grandson of Irish Birdcatcher. Can't beat 'em for blood and action, but I've had some trouble to breed up to the size."

"Now, what pwice would such a team bwing heah?" said the Honourable Bertie, "in case one turned dealah in one's old days; a light business faw which I've always had a taste."

"It's a fancy price, perhaps, but I have been offered five hundred guineas for the four," said Mr. Baldhill. "I don't want to sell."

"Sell!" echoed the roused aristocrat, almost departing from his ordinary languor of demeanour, "I should

think not. Why, the leadahs would bwing all the money in England."

The plain was wide, the road level and sound, the air fresh, and the day not too warm as the party set out for the oft-quoted Merradoolah. The high-conditioned horses went at their collars, and the heavily-laden but well-appointed drag rolled away at a pace which showed how little they made of it. Well-bitted, well-broken, running true and level, in perfect form, the team settled down into a twelve-mile-an-hour trot, a pace which they appeared to be capable of keeping up for a hundred miles on end.

"The vewy poetwy of motion," exclaimed the Honourable Bertie, as with all the reins in his left hand, and the whip carelessly disposed as if he were tooling a dogcart, he sat in rapt admiration of the horses, the drag, the appointments, the road, and, lastly, himself in the character of charioteer. "They work even maw bwilliantly than I expected fwom their appeawance. How fah have we to go, and when do we get there, Baldhill?"

"Fifty-five miles; to-night, please God, we shall sleep at home."

"Don't you think it's wather a full stage without a bait? But I speak under cowection, as not knowing the ways of your intewesting countwy."

"And quite right, too, Mr. Stanhope," said Isabel. "Most English people have so little consideration in that way. They seem to think we have no sense either. They're always saying 'Why don't you do this?' 'I'm surprised you don't try that.' Just as if these obvious things wouldn't have been done if there hadn't been some good reasons against them. Oh, I nearly forgot to say that we stop at such a nice clean inn half-way, which we shall reach in about two hours, if you don't steady them a little."

"Going too fast, are we?" said Mr. Stanhope, moderating their transports. "So you do think of your horses a little in this countwy? I thought p'waps they could go on like this for evah, like the bwook."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Stanhope. We do just

the same reasonable things here that other people do. Ask dad and he'll tell you that it's a mistake to go too fast in the early part of the day. If you want to hit out you can do it in the last ten or fifteen miles, for then it won't matter. We don't want to get to Morrissey's before one o'clock."

"I begin to compwehend," said Mr. Stanhope. "We mustn't get to the half-way house too early, so we may pull back and pwoceed steadily. It's wather hard work, I can tell you, though; these pwoud steeds are deucedly fwesh and impatient."

It was scarcely past mid-day when the long-absent, welcome vision of Mr. Baldhill's drag, accoutred properly and furnished with visitors and the family, as of old, presented itself at the sign of the "Jolly Shearers," an old-fashioned, garden-surrounded inn on the bank of Emu Creek.

Mr. Stanhope and Sir John were charmed with the alacrity and completeness with which the unharnessing was managed. Almost before the ladies had descended from their seats, the four horses had been taken out, and upon their driver throwing down the reins, led off to the long range of stabling by an elderly hostler and his helper. The party was ushered into a cool, roomy apartment by the hostess, a buxom, middle-aged woman, who was enthusiastic in her greeting. The amount of honest satisfaction and real friendliness which she displayed was refreshing to behold.

"Walk in, Mrs. Baldhill! Well, I'm that glad to see you and the master here again in the bush and among our people as I can't hardly say what I've got to say. And little missie that was, Miss Bella, what a grand young lady she's growed into! My word! I couldn't have believed it. Come along in, though, out of the sun. There's the best bedroom, and the one next to it. You'll find 'em clean anyhow, and tidy. You can settle yourselves how you like. The gentlemen can take any of 'em on the other side, and now I'd best go and send in some dinner. So you're quite well, Mrs. Baldhill?"

"I am as well as ever I was in my life, Mary Ann," said that good lady. "And not sorry to see Emu

Creek again. Many's the time Mr. Baldhill and I've stopped here before, and it seems like home to see the old place again. I recollect the sofa and these chairs when you got 'em new as well as if it was yesterday. There's nothing like the bush for real comfortable living, after all."

"Quite of your opinion, my dear Mrs. Baldhill," said Sir John. "All this sort of thing strikes me as truly delightful. The drive over grand natural roads, the fresh dry air, and all that. And now this jolly, old wayside inn, with everything so snug and beautifully clean. Look at the tablecloth, napkins and all. I feel confident I shall have a splendid appetite."

"And I'll be bound Mrs. Morrissey has got something extra good for us," said Mr. Baldhill. "She'd know we were coming from the man, and she likes to do things well. Ah, I thought so. What a splendid wild turkey. Now the murder's out. We'd better get ready for dinner—we haven't too much time to spare."

By the time Mr. Baldhill and his friends had concluded their lavations the whole dinner equipage was in place and official notice given of the fact. When the party sat down a most appetising flavour was diffused throughout the apartment. Without attempt at ornamentation there was little for a fastidious critic to condemn.

A noble wild turkey, perfectly roasted, displaying the brown breast-meat, white legs, and pinions which content the southern epicure ; Mr. Baldhill fronted a saddle of mutton, hung for nearly a week—juicy and crisp it was—almost too good an alternative to the wild fowl ; new potatoes, green peas, lettuces, parsnips, and cauliflowers, all these last from the heathen Chinee encampment lower down the creek, which comprehended gardens. The light wines of the country—Dalwood and Cawarra—sound and cool, were found to harmonise perfectly with the generous fare.

"No dinner like this in Egypt, eh, Stanhope?" said Mr. Baldhill, exultingly, as he forwarded a second consignment of the ample breast to that gentleman. "It will be nearly as hot coming back as the Nile bank.

But the notion of comfort's different hereabouts, isn't it?"

"Landlady Bwitish evidently," affirmed the Honourable. "Makes a wemarkable diffewence in this kind of thing; don't it, Jack? Old England faw cookewy and—aw—clean linen. Next to whatsy'name, you know."

Mr. Baldhill filled himself a glass of the white Dalwood with the air of one requiring refreshment after his late fatigues. Drinking it slowly and appreciatively, he then replied: "Pure Australian, thoroughbred currency; born within thirty miles from here; daughter of an old sheep overseer of mine; mother Irish; very clever, industrious woman, gives her mind to her business."

"You suppwise me. Wegawded her from her accent and English ways as a distinctly marked home pwoduct. But, weally, you New South Wales people are more English than the English themselves; good old-fashioned style, too. How vewy intewesting!" and here Mr. Stanhope looked inquiringly around.

"The reason is, I suppose," said Isabel, "that in the country parts the manners and customs which the people brought with them nearly a century since are unchanged. With some exceptions, like Mrs. Morrissey's people, they were English village folk."

Every one felt fully rested and refreshed by the time the horses were led round, their coats showing all proper attention. Again they took the road, which—save for an occasional shrubbery of which the bright-leaved trees and flowers, strange of petal and hue, made welcome change in the eternal ocean plain—was an exact copy of the pre-symposial stage. The horses swept along without the slightest abatement of pace or alteration of form, with heads held high and the free-stepping, darting trot in which time was evenly kept. Three hours and a small portion of the fourth had gone by, when an elevation crested with waving trees, the gleam of a broad winding sheet of water, the halt at a pair of gates of more than usual ornamentation, aroused interest and curiosity in the strangers.

"Here we are," said Mr. Baldhill, looking at his watch, "and in good time, too. There's the old place. Mrs. Mortimer and gentlemen, welcome to Merradoolah! Thank God, it's a good season, anyhow," he continued; "look at the wild oats, and the crowfoot, with the trefoil smothering everything like a crop of lucerne; the water in the Cowall, too, bank-high on both sides. Who'd ever think as we've seen this very place at this time of year all dust and ashes, as you might say, the Cowall as dry as a bone, the fish all dead, and we carting every drop of water eight miles!"

It would indeed have required a person of strong imagination, under the present aspect of affairs to reproduce this extremely realistic picture. The waving grasses, the succulent herbage, the shining lakelet, in which numbers of wild fowl swam and disported themselves; the great flocks of sheep, which, fat, and well-grown, and heavily fleeced, seemed half-hidden in that abundant pasture—all things appeared to denote a pastoral Arcadia, a reign of peace, plenty, and unbroken prosperity for man and beast. How, indeed, could the mental vision travel forward a few years, and descry these very regions bare, desolate, barren as "the deep's untrampled floor" (which it probably was in far remote æons), the birds fled, and the emaciated flocks dying in tens of thousands?

But this abomination of desolation was apparently far off; neither, should it immediately commence, could Mr. Baldhill's immense fortune and manifold investments be dangerously affected. He was in a position to treat such a contingency as an undesirable natural phenomenon, but not otherwise menacing his interests materially.

"Come, dad," interrupted Isabel, "you need not bring out these unpleasant stories now. They're not amusing, and everybody says the seasons have changed, and that we shall never have these terrible droughts again. At any rate, Merradoolah is fit to look at now, so don't frighten Sir John and Mr. Stanhope; only show them where their bath-room is first thing, and then their rooms, so that they can dress comfortably for dinner."

These instructions were superfluous, as in accordance

with the general habitudes of the establishment, Mr. Stanhope and his friend found that nothing remained for them to do but, as in an English country-house, to surrender their persons and portmanteaux to the officials who presently took charge of both.

The former were carried off to a detached building, in which, in addition to extremely comfortable chambers, were bath, billiard and smoking-rooms. Mr. Baldhill looked in to see that they wanted for nothing, indicated the bath facilities, mentioned that dinner would be at 7 o'clock, and departed.

"So this is the way these energetic colonists mortify the flesh!" said Sir John to his friend and comrade as they sat arrayed in evening costume in a couple of luxurious easy chairs awaiting the dinner gong. "They don't spend all their time chopping down trees, or galloping about on horseback, or tending their flocks, or fighting Indians, as we were led to imagine in England."

"Twees appeah scarce in this part of the countwy," said the Honourable Bertie; "but our worthy host did not always live like this. He did the twee-chopping first, depend upon it, in some form. When a man makes his pile, or lands a big stake, he can live as he likes. There goes the gong! I wonder if the billiard-table has been looked after? We must have a fluke or two to-mowow morning."

"This feels like old times," said Sir John Danvers, as they filed into the drawing-room after their host, and found themselves in a lofty, cool apartment, handsomely furnished in strictly modern taste, where Mrs. Baldhill, Mrs. Mortimer, and Isabel, in evening dress, had already arrived.

"I don't know whether we shall be able to eat anything," said Isabel, "after lunching on wild turkey, and all the rest of it at Mrs. Morrissey's; but we always dine late when we're up here, and it was hardly worth while to alter things."

"Wecollect eating two dinnahs in one day long ago," said Mr. Stanhope; "first one at Dijon, time midday. Aftah we weached Pawis, the othah fellahs insisted on dining at Vevy's. Marvellous to welate, we all did

vewy well theah, fwom the soup to the celewy, and dwank a bottle of champagne fwappé each. Felt as fit as possible next morning, assu-ah you."

"Whether it's the bath, or the bush air, or the surprise of finding such a palace in the wilderness, I can't say," said Sir John; "but I really feel as if I had only had a glass of beer and a sandwich for lunch. I shouldn't be surprised if I emulated this feat of Bertie's. But he has a superior appetite generally, if you remark."

"It's the luckiest thing my old cook came back here a month ago," said Mrs. Baldhill, "or it wouldn't have mattered much whether the dinner was late or early. Though she's a funny old thing, she's an astonishing talent for cookery, and as she's not likely to go till after the shearing on account of the wages, we're safe for that time."

This was voted to be the most enjoyable entertainment since Wak-wallah. The *menu* was tempting and delicate, the light wines in perfect condition, the whole service and appointments, even to the trim parlourmaid, whom Mrs. Baldhill had sent on in advance, were such as to charm and surprise the visitors. The dinner concluded, the ladies half an hour after pleaded fatigue and retired for the night; while the men, having made a shorter sojourn than usual in the smoking-room, did not disdain to follow their example.

Breakfast was initiated at the respectably early hour of eight o'clock, at which time, summoned by the second gong, all the inmates of Merradoolah appeared, looking exceedingly fit and fresh. Mr. Baldhill had indeed walked over to the woolshed shortly after 5 a.m., and had for a couple of hours made a searching inspection of the important business being transacted within that imposing edifice.

He had returned shortly after 7 o'clock, well satisfied with the shearers, the wool rollers, the pressers, the pickers-up, the shed manager—in fact with everybody and everything but the wool-sorter.

"Everything's going on very fair," he observed to the overseer, Mr. Driver; "but that wool-sorter ain't up to the mark. He knows, in a general way, the difference between first clothing and second combing,

but that's as much as he does. If he goes on that way, he'll muddle the clip. This is one of the best seasons we have had for many a year, that is, and I want to turn out the Merradoolah wool A1. What's to be done?"

"I'm blest if I know, sir. There's a run on classers this season, and of course all the other sheds are in full work. We mightn't get one till the end of the year."

"I know of a man that's up to his work," said the proprietor, "and one I've promised to do something for. If this chap'll work under him, well and good. If not, he'll have to go."

"Oh! I dare say he'll be reasonable; he's not a bad meaning fellow, and I'll talk to him a bit. He'd better just pack the wool in the bins till the other man comes up."

"Just so. Tell him he'll have the same wages, and all I want him to do is to take orders from the man I'll get up, and help him all he can. Make him understand that."

"All right, sir; he'll do it. He won't be fool enough to quarrel with his bread and butter."

"Then I'll go to breakfast," quoth Mr. Baldhill. "My man ought to be up in three days."

Now Mr. Baldhill had ascertained at second hand (through Mrs. Mortimer and Isabel) that Monsieur Alphonse Durand was an experienced and scientific wool classer, having been employed in that capacity on the Rambouillet stud farm and other celebrated Imperial merino establishments in France. He carried a diploma and numberless certificates of efficiency. Mr. Baldhill had, on this account, promised Marie that he would either directly or otherwise procure her husband a situation on some station where his attainments in this branch of pastoral science would have scope and recognition. He had not brought him up to Merradoolah, thinking very properly that his manager was not to be lightly interfered with in arrangement of detail. But now that an opening had presented itself he decided upon his course.

A mounted messenger bore to the township the following telegram: "To Mr. Alphonse Durand, Bay

View House, Macquarie-street, Sydney," that being the address which had been supplied by Marie at their parting on the wharf. This was the wording :—

"Come at once to Railway Terminus, Ringwood, both of you; permanent employ; salary satisfactory; rooms prepared.

"J. BALDHILL, Merradoolah.

"8 A.M., September 20, 1884."

"That'll fetch 'em," said Mr. Baldhill, perusing his missive admiringly. "He'll know I mean him to bring Marry. He'll be just the man for the work, and she can stay with the missus and Bella, just as she did before; she was always a merry-hearted, amusin' little shrimp. We seem to miss her above a bit."

When Mr. Baldhill at breakfast related his achievement he was overwhelmed with congratulations. He had done exactly what everybody wanted him to do. It was a brilliant piece of originality, his thinking of such a plan. Everybody sang his praises in chorus. He was in the happy position of having accidentally pleased everybody. Had Mr. Baldhill been a classical scholar he would have said piously "*Absit omen.*" It was obviously too good to last.

CHAPTER XLV

HOWEVER, next morning all was *couleur de rose* and joyous expectation. The guests had slept well. Every one did justice to the glorious cold round of beef, the chops and steaks, the hot rolls, cream and fresh butter, the honey and marmalade, and the broiled fowl with mushrooms, which constituted the morning meal. Mr. Baldhill was in unusually high spirits. Old memories were strong within him. The present season and its concomitants recalled an earlier time when the click of

the shears exercised upon his own sheep was the pleasantest music which could meet his ear.

"What are we all going to do with ourselves to-day?" asked Isabel, as if a more serious aspect of life were imminent. "Shall we show Mr. Stanhope and Sir John the practical side of Australian life?—that it's not all 'beer and skittles,' as the man we met in the train said who had lost five thousand head of cattle and two-thirds of his sheep the year after he bought Bondolmon. What do you advise, mother? How are these gentlemen to begin to acquire a real idea of the country?"

"Doesn't everybody go and look at the shearing first thing; that is, when there is any going on?" said Mrs. Baldhill. "We don't hear of much else, I'm sure, this month and next, so we may as well let Mr. Stanhope and Sir John understand what it's all about."

"The vewy thing," said the Honourable. "Most anxious to see a big 'shed.' That's what they call it heah, isn't it?"

"Let us all go over this afternoon, then," said Isabel. "And it won't be a bad idea to tell dad that we're coming. After we've had an hour or so of it we can go for a ride. Gholab and his precious horses (on his head be fortune!) are here all safe. It will be nice and cool in the late afternoon, so that we can stay out till nearly dinner time."

"Combines pleasure with instruction," said Sir John. "I shall be able to tell them wonderful things at home; only they won't believe me, I'm afraid."

The morning was spent by the young men partly in the billiard-room—where they found the cloth, the cues, and all necessaries in good order and condition—and partly in the stables. Into the latter establishment they lounged about mid-day, chiefly with the idea of inspecting the grand animals which had brought them so fast and safely on their upward journey.

The team was looking well in their stall boxes, with rugs and all other appointments, much as in England, while their legs elicited from both gentlemen expressions of fastidious approval.

"How is it," Sir John inquired of the coachman,

"that you manage to keep your horses' legs so uncommonly clean and free from puffing? They must be very regularly exercised."

"They exercise themselves, sir," said the official. "Do you see that small paddock, with the high paling fence round? In the hot weather we turn 'em into that o' nights, and in winter time by day. It's warmish now, so we keep 'em in this cool stable all day, so as the flies don't bother 'em, and at night they can move about in the paddock, and cool their legs and feet like."

"First-rate idea!" exclaimed Sir John, "when you come to think of it. Wonder it never occurred to us in England. Helpers are cheap there, that's one thing, so we don't trouble ourselves to find substitutes."

"Like to see the stables, gentlemen?" said the coachman. "They're the best in this district, people say. Master took a lot of trouble about them; had plans drawed, and I don't know what all."

Shouldn't have dweamed of finding stables like these out heah," said the Honourable, with a rapt expression of wondering surprise. "Must weally wefuse to expwess opinions in futchah, been sold so fwequently."

"A good resolution," said Sir John. "Strikes me we'd better open our eyes and ears and keep our mouths shut for the next month or two. We must do the stables, though."

They followed the highly respectable coachman, who in stable jacket and gaiters led the way to the harness room. There was the four-in-hand set, best Long Acre quality, the carriage pair harness, the buggy sets, both single and double, all in perfect order, well secured from damp and dust, behind sliding glass frames. Saddles and bridles were dispersed upon their various pegs and stands, the bits and irons of which shone like silver. A fireplace denoted a convenient rallying point in a wet afternoon, as well as a preservation against damp

As for the horses, they were of various sorts and sizes —necessitating a considerable number of loose boxes, stalls being regarded as heterodox. Hacks were there— middle-sized, well bred, and "fit to go for a man's life." A couple of lately broken colts, a thoroughbred sire, a

steeplechase horse in training, and a pair of fast trotting buggy horses. To Gholab had been adjudged a separate wing where he could feed, dress, and adore his beloved steeds without let or hindrance.

In the forage room bales of pressed hay, bundles of lucerne, bins filled with maize, chaff, and bran, showed that provender of the best sort was never wanting. A high-walled courtyard connected the coach-houses, sleeping rooms, and stables, a threefold line of buildings forming a convenient outlet for the equipages of the establishment.

By means of a wind-mill water was brought from the creek and laid on by pipes, so as to be available in every loose-box and in every corner of the house and stables.

"No end of riding horses here, as well as coachers; a sweet park hack, that bright bay with a star," said Sir John. "Puts me in mind of the *Arabian Nights* business, where you've only got to clap your hands and they send up everything you want. 'Bring more curricles!' That sort of thing. I suppose they could mount Abdallah and all his men here on a pinch. I wonder when we shall see a lance or a tulwar again? Near thing for Allerton, though! Wonder why he didn't come up here with us?"

"Natuwally wanted to see his own place, I expect. Had enough of our company faw one while. Asked us to come and see him by-and-by, you know."

"I vote we go when the shearing's over here. Nothing like seeing the country. I suspect we shall be glad enough to make for Sydney at Christmas."

"Pwobably hot by that time. I should pwefah a wesidence heah in the wintah. Long way fwom town, that's all."

"It certainly is, when you come to think of it," said Sir John, laughing. "All the same, I never saw a country I'd sooner live in. The people here have all the best part of our English ways, and essentially our manners and customs, with more freedom, less ceremony, but genuine friendliness. Magnificent distances, too, give a flavour of adventure that's wanting in Britain. If I were a young fellow—and hard up, as I

used to be, before poor Cyril dropped in India—nothing would have kept me away from Australia."

"Same heah," said the Honourable Bertie. "Perfectly chawmed with the countwy, the people, the horses —evewything! All the same, I suppose next hot weathah will see us homeward-bound again."

"Shouldn't wonder," said his companion. "I generally find that a year in a new place, even if I've been ever so enthusiastic at first, sees me at the end of my interest. Then I set out to create a new country, new friends, new surroundings of all sorts, with whom I get on quite as well as with the former ones."

"Doesn't beah the impwess of stability, Jack, I'm afwaid," said the Honourable Bertie; "but it's the way of the world. Some day you'll make a fwiend that you won't like to leave pwobably; what then?"

"I shall do as other men, I suppose. Meantime *vogue la galère*. And *à propos*, there goes the luncheon bell. My appetite up here is simply fiendish."

. . . . . .

There was great anxiety and curiosity in the shed when it was announced that Mrs. Baldhill and other ladies, besides "The Boss" and "two swells from Home," were coming down to see the shearing. Some slight admonition was thought necessary by the overseer, to the effect that the ordinary shed conversation, marked by more freedom than elegance, was to be wholly repressed, and superseded by studiously correct and colourless talk.

The irreverent wits of the party chafed at this, but submitted with a good grace to the inevitable, partly on account of the unwonted appearance of strange ladies, and partly because of Mr. Baldhill's unvarying popularity.

Luncheon over, it was decided to walk to the woolshed, an ample, informal building distant about a mile from the house, which had early in the day attracted the attention of the two Englishmen.

"The weather *is* rather warm than otherwise," admitted Isabel; "but after Egypt, I suppose it will

not seriously affect any of us. Mrs. Mortimer and you two foreigners will see something different from dear, neat, steady-going old England."

"Delighted to see sheep-shearing on a large scale," said Sir John; "but my dear Miss Isabel, you are not to call us foreigners. It is unfriendly, too, after all our joint adventures."

"We were all English when we were in the desert," said Isabel, "but now we are Colonists, as you proud Britons call us—believing in your hearts that we have degenerated more or less. So you will have to be foreigners, or what the men call 'new chums,' until you have gained colonial experience."

"Dweadful depwivation," said the Honourable, with plaintive apprehension. "Is it anything like fwee-masonwy? Ordeal to go thwough? Novices to be blindfolded, and so on?"

"Not quite so bad as that," laughed Isabel. "And some people being clever and sensible, get over their apprenticeship—their *wanderjähre*—(you like German, Sir John)—sooner than others, only you mustn't mind being laughed at if you make little mistakes."

"Gweat Heavens!" exclaimed the Honourable Bertie, "I'm only a youngah son, and my position is one of humility. But fancy Jack heah, such a swell in his own countwy, a live bawonet, with an unencumbahed estate, being laughed at in Austwaliah!"

"Strikes me, Master Bertie, that you are learning one Australian accomplishment already," said his friend. "That of 'blowing.' I must ask you to permit me to be my own trumpeter."

"Oh, we're no respecter of persons here," said the southern maiden. "We should laugh at the Prince of Wales himself, if he made the mistakes some of you do. Not but what we're frantically loyal. I can't exactly describe our feeling out here. We're pathetically attached to the throne, but we have not that deeply-rooted inborn reverence for rank—that instinctive habit of 'ordering ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters' which English people have."

"Quite wight," said the Honourable Bertie. "You've few equals and no supewiors, Miss Isabel. You've

expwessed the Austwalian welation to Bwitain admiwably. *Je vous en fais mes complimens.*"

"I didn't mean that," she replied, blushing slightly, "and you know it, Mr. Stanhope. So we'll change the conversation. How many sheep are you going to shear this year, daddy?"

"About two hundred and thirty thousand altogether," said her father; "but the Banjee flocks will be shorn on their own run. A hundred and eighty thousand's enough for one shed."

"You take my bweath away," said Mr. Stanhope. "Two hundwed thousand odd! And what are their fleeces worth, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"Oh, five or six shillings each; sometimes a little more."

"Gwacious heavens! No wondah colonists appeah to take life on the whole wather easily. Sowwy I didn't emigwate in early life."

"It's not too late now," said Isabel. "Papa will show you how to begin. In ten years you might be ever so rich—if the seasons keep good."

"Afwaid I should hardly succeed as a squattah. Howevah, must give the subject my earnest considewation."

They were now almost at the entrance of the wool shed, and upon nearing the immense congeries of yards, roofs, huts, and buildings of all kinds, of different sorts, sizes, and dimensions, the surprise of the visitors was apparent.

"What a town," said Marguerite. "It puts me in mind of a fair which I saw when I was a girl—quantities of sheep, and ever so many dogs; only things are more silent and orderly here."

"There is no beer allowed for one thing," said Mr. Baldhill. "Our people don't mix work and play well together. We find tea the best thing until shearing is over. After that they do as they choose. And now, Driver, which way shall we go in?"

Mr. Driver, who had taken off his hat and bowed comprehensively to the whole party, now advanced. "I think we'll show the ladies where the sheep come in," he said, "and afterwards we can come up to the floor.

It's a good cutting day, and the men are shearing well."

They walked through a gate in the more distant part of the enclosure, between two great buildings. They observed primarily an immense shed, entirely filled, even crowded, with sheep. These were standing together, yet divided by pens, upon a floor of open battens, promoting cleanliness and ventilation. The hundreds of clean, highly-washed fleecy bodies had a curious appearance, jammed together as they were, alike helpless and patient, with eyes mutely pleading for relief.

"Poor things! I always feel for them," said Isabel. "When I was a little girl, I used to think the slaves were packed in a slaver's hold like them, being smothered every now and then, as the poor sheep are when they get too closely pressed."

"But they were packed in three tiers, one above another, in the old slave ships," said Danvers. "Some of those in the Arab dhows on the Nile didn't look too comfortable either. These are much cleaner, that's one thing."

"And most of them will be on the grass to-morrow," said Mr. Baldhill. "They'll be out by dinner time at the rate they are working now, Driver tells me. Watch the sheep running up this race."

This was an interesting operation, and the visitors were amused by the gravity with which an old sheep-dog advanced to a corner of one yard, when the narrow outlet called a "race" was opened, and intimidated certain sheep, more by silent expressiveness than by barking, until they ran into it. He then drew back, dividing those behind, which pressed forward and filled up the gap instantly.

Then the double moving doors at the farthest end being held by a lieutenant of Mr. Driver's, the sheep ran through uninterruptedly, and were separated with wonderful quickness and accuracy into different divisions and enclosures.

"Howevah do they contwive to let them wun thwee or four ways at once?" said Mr. Stanhope. "Is it by haphazard?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Baldhill, smiling. "That

man notes a brand or an ear-mark on every sheep as it comes towards him, which tells him what his place is. But it's pretty quick work, isn't it? In England they would catch every sheep and lift it over the fence."

"Is not that the surest way?" said Sir John.

"Slow and sure, if you like," said Mr. Baldhill; "but how many men and how many days would it take, do you think, to draft twenty thousand sheep—a lot we can put through before breakfast, if we begin early enough?"

"I understand," said Sir John. "The immense numbers of sheep you have here could never be treated in our Old World way. And yet, how simple is the principle of those little gates—working so cleverly both ways."

"The 'swing gate,'" said Mr. Baldhill, "and a wonderful saving of labour it is—was an Australian invention. It was never known in Britain. One of our colonists was smart enough to discover it."

"And a great many other things," said Isabel. "And 'Oh, Australia! and oh, my native land!' as Wentworth says in that beautiful poem of his (it's twice as fine and original as the one of Praed's that those old Cambridge dons gave the prize to); we shall discover ever so many more things yet, and make our mark in art, science, and literature, which Lord Kimberley doubted whether we had ever heard of. But though this is very interesting, and these portcullis doors are lovely, I vote we go and interview the shearers."

Passing up a long aisle, and noting how, by an artful reticulation of enclosures, the rows of small pens were filled and refilled from a central reservoir of unshorn sheep, they reached the "floor," as that most ancient arena—the shearing floor—is called, *par excellence*.

The sight was uncommon and bordering upon the dramatic. On either side of the immense floored enclosure stood nearly one hundred men, each holding or bending over a sheep in different stages of denudation of fleece. "The sheep before her shearers is dumb"; still, sounds were heard, a ceaseless clicking of the steel shear blades supplied a sort of running accompaniment? But little conversation took place, what there

was being low in tone, and apparently of an unimportant nature.

The men were, for the most part, young and in the prime of life, a few grizzled beards only being observable. It could be seen at a glance that they were working up to the extreme limit of endurance and speed in their avocation.

"What a fine set of men!" said Sir John, as he marked the tall athletic figures, the prompt, intelligent air, the manly expression and bearing of the majority. "If these are your ordinary labourers, I must say they are considerably in advance of our British rustics, of whom we are so proud. Are these men a class by themselves, or merely average specimens?"

"Perhaps they are a turn above the ordinary bush hand, but not much," said Mr. Baldhill; "they're chiefly small farmers, free selectors, as we call them, and their sons—others just station hands that have picked up the knack of shearing. It pays well."

"They are all native born Australians, I suppose?"

"I should say all—except perhaps a few of the older men. It's rare now to see a shearer who isn't a native. In my early days most of 'em were from the old country; and good men too. But these young fellows can shear rings round them."

"How are they wemunewated?" inquired the Honourable. "By weekly wages?"

"I am afraid they would not work as hard as they do at that rate," said Mr. Baldhill, smiling. "No! this is piecework. A pound a hundred, and find themselves—that is, they pay for their food. That young fellow in the striped jersey that turned out the well-shorn sheep just now will have shorn nearly a hundred and fifty sheep to-day when they knock off."

"One pound ten shillings for a day's work!" said Sir John. "No wonder they work hard. And what has he to pay out of it?"

"About half-a-crown, but he couldn't make the pace better if he was working for his life. He's doing his level best; and, when the grass seed's coming on, it's a good thing to get 'em to wire in like that."

"This is indeed a wonderful sight," said Marguerite.

"I have seen sheep-shearing in old times in England, when we lived in the country; but it was always done very carefully. It seemed a slow, painstaking, performance. The poor sheep had their legs tied, and were lifted up on a table."

"We shouldn't have time for all that here," said Isabel. "Look at Mr. Burrawong Jack there; isn't that the young man Mr. Driver was talking about, father? He hardly seems to have let go his last sheep, and now he has another half shorn. How his back must ache, I should think."

"They work like niggers when they are about it," said Mr. Baldhill, "and earn plenty of money. It seems a pity when they spend it foolishly. But these men will take away their cash mostly to help their harvesting in the high country."

"Fine upstanding fellows, most of these," said Sir John. "Taller than our men, they don't look quite so broad. You're rearing a nation in this great country that will do honour to the old flag some day."

"We hope so," said Mr. Baldhill. "The country fellows are the best. They're neither so well built nor so well behaved in the big towns."

"Case all the world over," said Stanhope. "God made the countwy, and so on. Stwikes me these men are smarter-looking, better set up and turned out than our yokels. Don't look like backwoodsmen, eh?"

"They *are* sharper in a general way," said Mr. Baldhill. "They travel about and pick up ideas. It must improve 'em, like the rest of us, you know. Burrawong Jack's been to Victoria and New Zealand. He's quite a man of the world. Driver told me he saw him come in from a ride on Sunday last togged out in a tourist suit, with shoes, too, and coloured socks. Fancy Giles Chawbacon with shoes and a tweed suit."

"I should like to have seen him," said Isabel. "According to that dear Charles Kingsley's ideas, we ought to ask him up to tea. But we're not quite advanced enough yet. In another century, who knows?"

"I perceive that the equality in Australia, of which I heard something in England," said Sir John, "is

chiefly theoretical. For my own part, I prefer it to remain in that stage; but there is no saying where the communistic principles that are gaining ground in Europe will end."

"Don't mind fwaternising with the pwivate soldier on a march or in action," declared the Honourable. "Vewy good fellow, Tommy Atkins, in his way; but decidedly object to him as a man and a bwother, when the campaign's ovah."

"You can love your fellow-creatures as much as you like," said Isabel. "But life wouldn't be worth living if one were compelled to associate with people whose tastes and habits were utterly dissimilar."

"*Is* life worth living?" asked Marguerite softly. "Would the practice of utter renunciation for our Lord's sake be so utterly hard and distasteful, do you think?"

"I can't say how I may feel when I'm old and there is no more sunshine in the world," said Isabel; "but at present—ah! me, why should I go down into a vault and put on grave clothes? I see the wool-room over there, and the dear, raw-silk-looking fleeces. Oh! dad, talking of fleeces, won't Monsieur Alphonse be up in the train to-morrow?"

"Yes, and I'll be glad to see him," said Mr. Baldhill. "The wool-room is getting regularly choked up with fleeces, and he'll have a week's work to get through to begin with."

"Can't we do something in the way of a small compliment for these poor fellows?" said Isabel. "Just to make them glad we've come. They do seem to be working so hard. One man has cut his hand badly, and another looks pale and has his wrist bandaged up. I know what that means."

"Tell them, Driver, they'll all be paid a shilling a hundred extra," said Mr. Baldhill, "when they're settled up with; that is, of course, those that shear well, and stop till the shed's cut out. Tell 'em Miss Isabel gives it to 'em."

This announcement being heard by the men who were nearest the party, was promptly telegraphed to the others, the consequence of which was that there

was a murmur of thanks and appreciation quietly audible, while Mr. Burrawong Jack, who, having just let go his sheep, was unimpeded as to attitude, raised himself to the full height of his grand stature, and taking off his shearing cap made a highly creditable bow.

"A guardsman lost in that fellah," said Stanhope. "Pity you haven't an Austwalian ahmy, isn't it? A smart sergeant would soon turn him out a cwack fwont-wankah."

"Just as well as he is," said Mr. Baldhill. "As for the army, I hope we sha'n't want one in my time; not but what these fellows have plenty of bulldog in them, when it's necessary to show it."

"Runs in the breed, I suppose," said Sir John. "Melibœus could stand up to his man, I expect, as well as loaf in the shade—*sub tegmine fagi*, and all that. I wonder how they got on with the shearing in Virgil's day? More fun and frolic, red wine, and roasted chestnuts, laughing girls, and so on. I suppose it would not work here. What hundreds and thousands of fleeces!"

This last exclamation was caused by their entrance into the wool-room, a large and comparatively lofty apartment, sub-divided by "bins" or divisions of battens close enough to confine the bulky fleeces, and reaching nearly to the roof. There was a perfect mountain of wool awaiting due discrimination and distribution into separate compartments.

"So poor Alphonse will have to sort all these to begin with," said Isabel. "However will he do it? Isn't it beautiful stuff underneath?" she said, lifting a fleece, and showing the wonderfully bright, serrated, lustrous fibre, which the under portion of a well-bred, well-washed, well-grown merino fleece displays.

"Most wonderful," said Marguerite, examining it closely. "I never thought it could be such a beautiful fabric. It is really not unlike the silk we used to unwind from cocoons in our childhood."

"And are you going to pay Alphonse well, father?" said Isabel. "I should like him to succeed, for poor Marie's sake. She is such a clever, honest, bright little

woman. I needn't ask you that, for you pay every one well. But will he have permanent work?"

"If he's lucky with this clip, and gets up his name as a real judge of wool, his fortune's made," said her father. "He has all the sciences at his fingers' ends, and if he can class our fine wools for the French market right, it will make all the difference to me, and him too."

"Oh! I'm so glad," said Isabel, clapping her hands; "and they'll live in the house, of course. There are two spare rooms near the old nursery that would do capitally for them. I must have Marie."

"Well," said Mr. Baldhill, not altogether readily, "the wool-sorter doesn't generally live in the house, but for Marie's sake I will make it right. And now, as you've seen all there is to see, you'd better go and have your ride before dinner. I've a lot of things to talk to Driver about."

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It was a most joyous *finale* to the day. The ride they took to a distant lake was long remembered. Marguerite had her old favourite, Zuleika, while Zohrab swept along the ever-level red sand tracks of the great plain with the deer-like freedom and tireless exhilarating speed of old desert days.

The visitors were provided with saddle-horses which in pace and general style abundantly proved that all the high-class weight-carriers did not abide in England. The sun was low and the air cool as they returned in the highest spirits and much contented.

CHAPTER XLVI

ALL this was but the prelude to weeks of idyllic enjoyment and calm, unruffled happiness, about which everybody raved, expressing their conviction that they had never before comprehended the essential luxuries of country life.

M. Alphonse Durand and Marie arrived duly by train, and were driven out, to the great contentment of Mr. Baldhill, regarding his wool, and of Isabel, who was hungering and thirsting after Marie's unvarying cheerfulness and sparkling epigrammatic talk. After a day or two, M. Alphonse had durably established a reputation with Mr. Baldhill and Mr. Driver, as to his talent for wool-classing, of being in that behalf the the quickest, deftest, and most delicately discriminating judge of differentiated wools that had ever set foot in the Merradoolah woolshed.

This was a piece of rarely met good fortune for all concerned, and the explanation of it by Mr. Baldhill made Marie's cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle in a manner which reminded her companions of some of their most fortunate and festive episodes.

Alphonse attended assiduously to his duties by day, and in the evening displayed himself to great advantage as *homme de salon*, and being really an intelligent, well-educated young fellow, proved quite an acquisition to their small circle.

The weather, too, conducted itself with unbroken benevolence. Blue and golden days, not too ardent, followed one another with pleasing regularity. The shearing proceeded prosperously. The workers, the pressers, the knock-about men—everybody, in fact, from Mr. Driver to the tar-boy, behaved with exemplary propriety.

A riding party concluded each day, or, if otherwise, the drag was turned out, and the Honourable had again an opportunity of appreciating the big brown horses.

Occasionally, too, neighbours came over on expeditions, made up in equal proportions of civility and curiosity, rendering themselves, however, more or less interesting as fresh types of Australian life.

In the morning Isabel worked steadily at her *magnum opus*, the *Battle of the Nile*, for which she persuaded Sir John to make sketches, and also wrote to Bruce Allerton, demanding from him several well-known bits of *genre* painting which had been shown to them on the journey. She fully intended to print her *brochure* directly after they arrived in town, and felt a well-

founded confidence, grounded on the novelty of the material that it would be the book of the season.

Sir John Danvers and Mr. Stanhope averred that such was the charm of Australian bush life (with late dinners, tennis, four-in-hand driving, shooting, and kangaroo coursing, billiards and occasionally whist thrown in), that they really had determined to settle in the country, particularly as from the extreme regularity and apparent ease with which the whole routine of station work went on, they judged that they themselves, if necessary, could soon learn to manage a station with fifty thousand sheep. At this assertion Mr. Baldhill was wont to smile.

Certainly nothing could be more complete in its way than the country-house life at Merradoolah. It had long borne the reputation of being perfect as a guest's house. Everybody was welcome to do as he liked. Everybody was helped and assisted in that laudable pursuit, whatever turn it might take, or in doing nothing at all, if that suited his constitution better.

Certainly many of the requisites for happiness or for civilised forms of enjoyment were there. There was, first of all, a delicious morning room, which contained magazines and journals, besides writing-tables and all things necessary for the most extended correspondence. One side was entirely filled with shelves in which resided a fair collection of classics and old editions, besides an assortment of modern history, travels, biography and fiction, which last exhibited traces of careful supervision by the lady of the house. Then there was the billiard-room, which answered indifferently well for smoking in the morning, besides preventing the young men from losing club form altogether. To this apartment a general adjournment was often made after dinner, when pool and cheerful converse filled up the time agreeably enough till the hour for retiring. Isabel generally distinguished herself at the game, playing with a dash and precision which few young ladies exhibited. M. Alphonse showed himself to be a neat and scientific performer. At this game, as well as at écarté and picquet, it was discovered that he was well able to hold his own with the sons of Albion. He was voted a decided addition

to the little society, and both he and Marie shared the honours always accorded to favoured guests.

Occasionally in the late still evenings the boat—which was kept well painted and otherwise repaired in a boat-house on the Cowall—was requisitioned for active service. Fitted with a sail in case of a capricious breeze, she was often speeded many a mile across the calm, deep waters. The night air was deliciously cool. There was a feeling of unreal adventure and strangely soothing languor as they floated, hour after hour, upon the dim solemn lake which loomed vast and shoreless in the midnight.

At luncheon the whole party made a point of meeting, and at that time arrangements were made for the afternoon's occupation and amusement. Riding and driving were the principal entertainments. From the number of horses and equipages, this form of amusement admitted of considerable variation. Mr. Stanhope and Sir John had a fervent admiration for the noble animal, and of the inexhaustible science which is connected with their breeding, breaking, riding, driving, and racing they deemed themselves to be past-masters.

They tried every form of harness or saddle-work, from the buggy trotters to the old stock horse which was kept to run up the ordinary working horses from the paddock. They made trials of their paces and courage, accomplishments and defects, their speed and endurance. It was during one of these impromptu performances that the Honourable's celebrated encounter with the buckjumper occurred. It had been guaranteed that something like an international contest would take place. The Honourable had expressed his wish to "wide an untwained coursah of the desert," and had emphatically declared his confidence in his own ability to "sit a buckjumpah, or whatevah you call it."

He had taken very kindly, with his friend, to the equitation portion of the establishment. He had noted with pleasure and interest the herds of brood mares and foals which roamed over the endless enclosures, and had watched the process of breaking-in the large annual drafts of colts and fillies—some destined for home use, some for the metropolis, and some, the pick of the

basket, for the Indian market. This breaking-in business appeared to be ceaselessly proceeding. Day after day fresh batches of youngsters seemed to be run in by the stock-riders, large, handsome, well-grown, well-bred, but somewhat in the condition of Mazeppa's involuntary mount—

> "With arching neck and flowing mane,
> And hoofs that iron never shod;
> By spur and snaffle undefiled."

As the great raking three-year-olds came into the high circular horse-yard, thence to be caught and haltered after rather a primitive and reckless fashion, also to be mounted shortly afterwards without regard to their feelings of extreme surprise and dislike to the educational course. Mr. Stanhope demurred. He did not hesitate, being more incautious and sympathetic on this subject than most others, to express his deep disapproval of the whole process. One morning he even went so far as to remonstrate when he saw the rough-rider, Bill Staunton, seated upon a very violent chestnut filly, she doing her very best to unseat him by frantic plunges, spasmodic "props," side leaps, kicks, and rearings, apparently simultaneous.

"This is the consequence," said he, "of the hasty tweatment of the young horses which you fellahs seem to delight in. I wondah you don't all get your necks bwoken. That mightn't mattah so much, but it spoils all these nice young horses; that's the worst of it. Once they get the twick of kicking like that they nevah lose it. It all depends upon the first mount how a horse turns out."

"You're sure of that, Mr. Stanhope," said Bill, with whom the two "new-chum gentlemen," as they were not disrespectfully called, were highly popular, on account of their general *bonhomie* and exceptional *largesse*. "You couldn't make no mistake, I suppose. Now I've been bred on the place same as the horse stock, and I've never done anything all my life but ride. I've been a breaker ever since I was ten year old, and my old dad used to wollop me with a stirrup-leather if I fell off. Now I ain't half as certain as you are. I

can't raly say what causes buck-jumping and vice in horses, and yet I've done my best to find out."

"Why, all the wough handling at the start, of course; any child can see that," said the Honourable.

"If it's so dashed plain to be seen, why haven't we seen it all this time? Mr. Baldhill's father had these runs, and first got the stud together. He was a smart man, but he never seen it. I never seen it, and I've been studyin' to work points in horseflesh ever since I left off petticoats. And here you come, Mr. Stanhope, from a place ten thousand miles off, and you see it first round."

"It wears a look of swagger," said Sir John, "I admit; but Mr. Stanhope only says what he's heard every trainer in England say. We all think so, and all the books say so."

The stud-groom and horse-breaker at Merradoolah was a tall, sinewy Australian, whom any one could have verified as belonging to that sub-section of the Anglo-Saxon race had they met him on the steps of the Coliseum. Like many of his countrymen he was slow of speech, but withal of a reflective and logical turn of mind. He did not, therefore, answer hastily when Mr. Stanhope said, "What else can it be? What othah weason can they have for such fwantic pwactices?"

Mr. William Staunton appeared to be taking counsel with himself, and carefully weighing evidence before he answered. At length he spoke:

"Haven't you never come across strains of blood, sir, among men and women, let alone dogs and horses, where, do what you would, they always turned out cronk? Bolted off the course, ran crooked, or went wrong some road, no matter how careful they were looked after? And other sorts never gave no trouble from the jump and went straight from post to finish? Did you think it was the first nurse they had, or the first school they went to, that did all the mischief?"

"Can't say for that exactly, William; but horses and dogs and men and women diffah matewially."

"Not so much, they don't—you take my tip for it, sir. Well, there's good and bad, treacherous and true,

straight and crooked, cowardly and game among horses just as there is among us. And you don't change their nature, mind that! You may keep 'em going pretty straight while your eye's on 'em; but the least check or bother, and then all the devilment shows out in 'em."

"But what made the chestnut filly 'buck,' as you call it?"

"She's Bay Kitty number nine. We number 'em according to the year. Now old Crazy Kate, her grandmother, she was by Vagabond, imported, and a savage old wretch that would almost eat a man. She *did* break a boy's leg and ribs one day. Bay Kitty, her daughter, was very little better, and this blessed wretch here would throw you first, and then study which eye she'd kick out of you afterwards."

"And you've tried to be quiet and peaceful with her, William?" said Sir John.

"I alway takes 'em easy if they let me," said Mr. Staunton. "The less trouble they give the better for both of us; but it don't answer with any of the old mare's stock. You must let 'em see you're master from the start."

"Any maw of them, William?" quoth the Honourable. "Seem to fancy I should like to twy my hand and see what wegulah tweatment might do."

"Certainly, sir," answered the Australian Master of Horse. "There's Kitty's three-year-old colt, own brother to this vixen here. That chestnut with the blaze face and white stockings you see there. Fine colt too. We'll halter him to-day, and you shall have him all to yourself, sir, if you'd like to try your hand at breaking, and see how your plan answers."

"You don't believe in my ability to wule the untamed steed by fair means and considewate tweatment. You're not sure of its ansahing?"

"I'm dead sure it won't," said the unabashed specialist, who, though perfectly respectful in manner, had no idea of being overcrowed by a lord, as they all considered the Honourable to be, in the matter of his own profession. "I'm that certain that the colt will do his best to shift you the first time you cross him,

that I'll lay a fiver he bucks ; and another that he puts you down, though you ride better than any other gentleman from the old country I ever saw at Merradoolah."

"Done with you, William," said the Honourable, good-naturedly. "Give you my word, I'll twy all my powahs of persuasion. You don't believe in the powah of patience. I wawn you I shall bit him pwopahly befąh I mount, and lunge him wespectably in English fashion."

"You may bit him till his mouth's like velvet, and lunge him for a year," said the unconvinced William, "and then he'll buck like a brumby. It's in the blood of 'em, and nothing any man can do 'll fetch it out. That's my tip, sir, and I've watched 'em close."

This colloquy had taken place before breakfast, and at that meal the subject was mentioned and received full ventilation. To Mr. Stanhope's surprise, the issue of his spirited enterprise was considered doubtful by the non-European powers of the conference.

"I should have thought," said Marguerite, "that any young animal would be completely subjected by patience and kindness. Surely what they need is an assurance that they will be treated with gentleness and forbearance, though I grant that Staunton rides superbly."

"Blood and all that's a strange thing, when you come to think of it," said Mr. Baldhill, meditatively. "There's people I've known where education and kindness and advice, everything that money and good-will could do, has been tried over and over again, and all for no good. The family fault breaks out in 'em, and it's the same with old Crazy Kate's lot. She was a regular old tigress, and they mostly take after her. Good-looking they are, too, and clippers to go."

"It's discouraging to think that careful training and early habitudes go for nothing," said Marguerite; "I am indeed surprised. Look at those horses of Isabel's —how gentle and docile they are. Now, the Arabs love their horses like children. Surely the same treatment would produce the same results here."

"I don't know much about Arabs," said Mr. Baldhill. "These two are out-and-out pets, and you might make

'em turn a barrel-organ, I believe; but even in the desert you'd find some tempers, I expect, if you knew where to look for them. As for our horses here, they follow their families mostly. I advise you to have nothing to do with any of the old mare's lot, Stanhope. They're not a good thing."

"And what do you advise, Miss Isabel?" said the Englishman. "Is a man who has widden with the Quorn and Pytchley to be bullied by a 'Waler' colt, a wegulah baby, with the odds in his favah of being allowed to 'gentle' him, as Wawey says?"

"You ride and drive beautifully, Mr. Stanhope, in your own line. I admire you immensely, and in the hunting field I hardly think Australians would have a chance with you; but riding through timber and breaking young horses are things you can't have had any practice in. You must excuse me for fearing that Bill Staunton will prove more than a match for you."

"Oh! surely not, if Bertie brings all his English stable lore to bear, Miss Isabel," said Sir John. "Our young horses give so little trouble when they're kindly treated."

"I'm only a *jeune demoiselle bien élevée*," said Isabel demurely. "Perhaps I don't know; but when this fortunate grandson of Crazy Kate's is to be mounted we'll all go and see. Very likely he'll be overawed and do nothing."

Here the discussion terminated. The ordinary amusements and occupations followed with tranquil regularity as before. The month that preceded the Christmastide was nearing its close; only a few weeks remained of the early summer time which they had arranged to spend at their pastoral retreat. The temperature had by this time become more decidedly torrid. Fiercely glowing was each day, even the evenings were sufficiently warm to send the whole party, with one accord, to their Cingalese chairs in the verandah directly dinner was concluded.

"Oh, *ciel!* It is as hot as Egypt—as the Thebaid!" exclaimed Marie, when the cloudless night, breezeless, silver-starred, with its unchanging azure and eastern in its calm splendour, had succeeded a more than

usually warm day. "Only we have no Arabs; no sense of exile; no fear of the morrow. These are much."

"We are far away from *La Belle France*," said Alphonse, inhaling his cigarette; "but, as for me, I regard not the patriotic *rôle*. Europe is becoming too full. One is even jostled; and since the war many things are changed. *Pour moi, je suis enfant de grand Bretagne.* What you call Breeteesh soobject, is it not?"

"When I left France," said Marie, "and found myself *en route* for the unknown land, I felt that I must die. Dost thou not remember—thou?" she said, appealing to Isabel. "Thou didst comfort me, and Madame Mortemère—*ange que vous êtes.* Now I should die to return. I mourn myself nightly—*ma foi*—to know how speeds that Bayard of a Sir Gordon. I figure to myself, perhaps, his corse, like those others near the walls of Zobeide, all bleeding, gashed, motionless. Hast thou forgotten him, Isabel, inconstant *Australienne* that thou art?"

"Say that word, again, and I'll carry you over and drop you in the Cowall, you little French dragon-fly that you are," exclaimed Isabel. "Do I not think of him by day, by night, in my prayers, in my dreams? I have cut out every paragraph that relates to him, every illustration from the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*, till I have a scrap-book as large as the sideboard. How I hope to end it all with the defeat and downfall of the Mahdi! No! in life or death Gordon will always be my hero. If anything happens to him the current of my life will be changed."

"I sometimes think people in the colonies feel a more vivid sympathy with our leading men and are capable of more intense hero-worship than we are in England," said Sir John Danvers. "I certainly have found people generally more *au fait* with the persons and incidents of modern history. I fell across a lady the other day who was better up in the life and times of General Herbert Edwardes, the Punjab man, you know, than I was, and we are related; she had never seen him either. Climate favours enthusiasm and admiration generally."

"For the noble and great," said Isabel, with flashing eyes—"for a name and fame above the blight of earthly breath! for the Körners, the Lawrences, the Havelocks,

the Hampdens, the Falklands of these and other days. And long may it be so! We are not ashamed of our national taste."

"He-ah! he-ah," said the Honourable Bertie, clapping his hands approvingly, "Miss Isabel; most chawming chawactewistic. Gwand cweachah, Gordon. Dwink his health at Cwistmas. Fancy spending Cwistmas at that beastly hole, Khartoum! Enough to kill and slay him without the help of the Mahdi. By the way, didn't you say, Governaw, that Bwuce Allerton was coming heah for Cwistmas?"

"Sorry to say he can't come," replied Mr. Baldhill. "Letter from him this afternoon. Had to go and deliver one of his cattle-stations on the Barwan. Purchaser wouldn't wait. I thought we should have been all together here for a week or two."

"What a shame!" said Isabel. "Oh, dad, why didn't we know in time? I'd have written him such a letter. I call that mean. It's all an excuse about his station. He could have sent his overseer, or a stock agent, or anybody rather than disappoint us. Don't you think he is wicked and ungrateful, and I don't know what all, Mrs. Mortimer? It's a weak invention, too. I wish I knew his real reason."

"Mr. Allerton generally has good reasons for his conduct," said Marguerite, calmly. "No doubt he has one now."

CHAPTER XLVII

THE Honourable Bertie Stanhope addressed himself to his task of subjugating the chestnut colt with determination; though forewarned of his inheritance of the fierce blood of Vagabond, a sire of astonishing speed, marred by a sullen, uncertain temper and distinctly cannibal tendencies, he lightly regarded that important fact. Bit and cavesson, lunging rein, and patient firmness would correct all erratic tendencies.

Method and perseverance would prove too much for any feeling of colonial independence the youngster might have. Besides, he was prone to disbelieve, like many English people, in even the defects of the Australian animal types, holding them to be necessarily inferior in resolution to their insular prototypes.

So, the colt having been haltered with Staunton's assistance, and inducted into a loose box with all proper consideration, Mr. Stanhope entered upon the enterprise with enthusiasm, and confidently predicted that he would have "Highflyer," as he asked permission to name the colt, quiet enough for Miss Isabel to ride him by Christmas.

"You won't catch me on his back," said that young lady with decision; "I should never have any confidence in him if he appeared ever so quiet and peaceable. I should never know the moment he wouldn't go off like a catharine-wheel and be the death of me."

"Surely, Miss Isabel, you don't think I would weccomend you to mount a horse not perfectly bwoken in for the world?"

"Quite so. *You'd* think he was quiet and trustworthy; but I should know that he wasn't. His heart would be the same. And horses have hearts just like men—some of them very bad ones too. So I should be sure he was only waiting for a chance, and some fine day he'd kill me, or do his best that way—perhaps himself too. He wouldn't mind that in the least."

"You Austwalians are—you must pardon me—the most obstinate people in some ways. Amounts to unweasonable pwejudice against poor Highflyah's family, against which the utmost pwopwiety on his part is unavailing. Most unkind!"

"Very well; Mr. Stanhope, of course, knows best, having lately come from the fountain-head of all knowledge. 'They're a simple people, these French. They don't know much about horses. Their priests keep it from 'em.'"

With this quotation from Judge Haliburton, which closed the dialogue, and in spite of his superior knowledge caused the honourable horse-tamer to reflect

how the Elder's experience in dealing had proved insufficient, from ignorance of an unknown factor, and to wonder whether, after all, these Arcadians might not have their hidden sources of knowledge even about matters so apparently simple as colt-breaking. He was resolved, however, to leave no means neglected by which he might win his bet, and, what he valued much more, prove to his entertainers and the "gallery" that, though a newly-arrived Englishman, he was capable of meeting colonists on their own ground, and proving a knowledge of rural accomplishments not inferior to their own.

To this end he daily dressed, fed, and watered Highflyer: led and lunged him with the assistance of one of the stable-boys, who became temporarily devoted to him, by reason of sundry half-crowns; carefully bitted and reined him; accustomed him to the sights and sounds of the buildings and farmyard; and in a general way put him through the first stages of equine education.

"Gweat point to accustom them to all the objects and sounds befaw they're mounted, George," he said affably to the lad, a sharp-witted station-bred urchin about fourteen, who, under a rustic demeanour, concealed much general knowledge of men and manners within his limited area, and more cunning, not to say undeveloped rascality, than was generally believed.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stanhope, I think that's the way; they're a deal too fond of jumpin' on 'em fust thing, the minute they're caught; and jammin' the hooks into 'em. That's what makes 'em go to market."

"You are a weally shwewd observer, my young fwiend," said the Honourable—"ideahs pahaps pwovincially expwessed. Now we must get this colt so quiet that when he's mounted, just befaw Cwistmas, he'll go off like a made horse—don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stanhope, he'll go all right!" replied the young monkey, who in his heart did not believe anything of the sort, looking upon Highflyer and all old Kate's lot as incurably "touchy" and only serviceable when in regular work, or lowered in spirit by poverty and wayfaring. "Bill Staunton thinks nobody can't

ride but himself, 'cause he's been here so long and knows all the mares and foals like a book."

"Staunton wides wewy well—most sensible fellah," said the Honourable, "but there are pwobably a few mattahs even *he* does not know. With pwopah care all the nonsense about buckjumping, as it is called, may be avoided."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stanhope," assented George, at the same time looking with interest at Highflyer standing near, who had suddenly exhibited symptoms of alarm at a piece of newspaper which the wind was blowing towards him. His ears were thrown forward, his eyes dilated and fixed, his nostrils expanded; his whole frame showed a nervous concentration which presaged some abnormal effect. Mr. Stanhope at once stepped to his head and patted his neck. "Steady, Highflyah," he said; "steady boy. Why, what's the mattah with the horse? His neck feels like a board." Here Highflyer gave a trumpet-like snort, and shivered all over. Mr. Stanhope held him more closely by the head, and spoke encouragingly to him, at the same time a swirl of wind carried away the object of terror in another direction, and the horse gradually recovered his self-possession.

"I nevah saw him so startled befaw," said the Honourable; "weally shouldn't have believed it of him. But he appeahed to twust in me aftah the wetched papah blew away."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stanhope," said the attendant sprite; "he didn't mind it a bit after you spoke to him. He knows you fust rate."

Mr. Stanhope was a little doubtful on the point, and also as to whether he had fully gauged the depths of Highflyer's temper, as on one or two other occasions he had shown unexpected powers of resistance. But the fit had passed off. He had wisely forborne to press for unconditional submission. On the next day the colt seemed to have recovered. He trusted that on any future occasions such would be the case, and on returning to the house named the day before Christmas as the one on which he would put his theory to the test of practice and mount Highflyer.

"I'm sure I wish you every success, Mr. Stanhope,"

said Isabel, who had been several times to see the redoubtable animal in his box, and had watched him at exercise. "You've taken a world of trouble with him, and it won't be your fault if he doesn't turn out well. But——"

"You think there's a 'but' in the affair; you weally can't believe that any Bwiton can know as much about horses as the wedoubtable William Staunton?"

"Only because they are his horses—his country's horses, I mean," said Isabel, gently. "He thinks, and I too, that we know our own country ways best, and about the people and animals that belong to it, because we've lived here all our lives."

"Appeahs weasonable," said the Honourable. "Pahaps I'm the obstinate cweatchah aftah all. The wesult must decide."

. . . . . .

Christmas was imminent. The shearing was over, the wool teams, with waggons bearing forty and fifty bales each, had all rolled away to the railway terminus. The sheep, shorn, tar-branded, slight and elegant of shape, had been turned out by thousands and tens of thousands into the paddocks, now so opulent in grass and water. All the hard and anxious work for the next six months was done and over. The shearers were gone; the washers, the knock-abouts, the supernumeraries of all sorts had been paid up. Cheques had been flowing like a financial fountain since the day after the shearing. In reaction, a certain feeling of loneliness, a hint of *ennui*, was felt in the atmosphere.

There were not above twenty or thirty people left on the place. These were boundary riders, stockmen, and members of the permanent staff, ordinarily necessary upon so large a property as Merradoolah. Only one day remained before the great annual festival common to all British communities. In the afternoon a truce to all labour conditions would be declared, and the modest modern Saturnalia lasting until the new year would be proclaimed.

After breakfast, according to invitation, the whole party from the "big house" walked over to the stables,

to which the Honourable Bertie had preceded them by a few minutes. As they came within sight they observed that most of the men about the place were collected in the stableyard, where Highflyer was being walked quietly about by George, who, clad in a new Crimean shirt, a comforter, and newly-washed moleskin trousers, evidently considered himself suitably attired for so important a ceremony.

To Highflyer, on his part, no exception could be taken by any lover of horseflesh or judge of the befitting in stable lore. The regular grooming, joined to a season of the year when under the Southern Cross every horse had a naturally fine coat, had given him a satin skin which shone golden-bright in the morning sun. He stepped lightly, he held his head well, and his arched neck and champing of the bit showed the perfection of his mouthing. His saddle was closely, but not too tightly girthed, while crupper and martingale both helped to prevent any undue alteration of garniture. George's expression was an indescribable affectation of honest confidence in his master's system and instinctive doubt of the colt's temper and tactics.

"The ground's rather hard, isn't it, Bill?" said Mr. Baldhill. "Mr. Stanhope rides well for a stranger to the country, but I expect the colt will shift him. You'd better hold him; the boy will let go if he makes a jump."

"All right, sir, he might go steady, and Mr. Stanhope has taken an awful lot of trouble about him. But you know the breed of him. What's bred in the bone—and cetterar."

"He's a grand colt," said Mr. Baldhill; "only he's too small an eye, you can hardly find a fault with him. I see Mr. Stanhope's ready now."

The colt did justice to his breeder's encomium. Standing fifteen hands and a half in height, he was compact, powerful, blood-like, with legs and feet of iron. His loins and quarters were immensely muscular; his shoulder oblique, though perhaps a trifle heavy on top. His eye was decidedly his worst feature. It was small, and, except when excited, dull of expression; a little white also showed above and below the pupil. As

Mr. Stanhope walked over to him, there was quite a buzz of admiration from the crowd.

"I'll hold him for you, if you don't mind," said Staunton. "He might move, and the boy ain't strong enough to stick to him."

"Thank you, William," said the Honourable. "It's weally vewy considewate of you."

Mr. Stanhope was attired for the occasion in boots and breeches; a cool close-fitting coat, without collar or necktie, completed a costume at once correct and suitable for the feat he proposed to himself.

"It's quite nervous work," said Isabel, as they watched their guest walk carelessly up to his mount. "I'd almost as soon do it myself. Suppose he should be hurt? Upon my word, my heart goes pit-a-pat; worse than it did before our battle."

"But does he not ride well? I always thought he rode beautifully," said Marguerite.

"He does and he doesn't," said his fair critic; "well enough for 'cross-country' work on any reasonable mount; but he's not quite good enough for a regular 'terror' like Master Highflyer. Oh! now for it. Stick to him, Bill."

These last exclamations, apparently involuntary, were elicited by the sudden course of events.

When Staunton took the colt's bridle from the boy, he stood close to the animal's shoulder, holding him firmly, close to the broad-reined snaffle in which he was ridden, the while patting his neck soothingly. The Honourable advanced with his usual leisurely step, and taking the reins, mounted lightly and easily, as if able to ride round the park. As his leg went over, the colt gave a fierce snort, and bounded from the earth, dragging Staunton with him, who hung on to him like a bulldog, forcing him to return to nearly the same spot. As he touched the earth with his fore-legs, the Honourable quietly took advantage of the occasion to put his right foot into the stirrup.

"Wather wapid and wesolute," said he; "didn't dweam he'd be so ungwateful. 'Gentlemen of the Guard, fire first.'"

"Look out, sir; he means it," said Bill; and at that

moment the colt, whose feet had seemed rooted to the earth but the instant previous, sprang into the air, all four legs off the ground at once, and lit with his nose between his fore-legs, having dragged his head down, in spite of Mr. Stanhope's efforts and the really fine mouth which he owed to that gentleman's unremitting attention.

Mr. Stanhope had had ample time before the second movement to fix himself firmly in the saddle. He was therefore prepared, and sitting well back, was not shaken in his seat when the colt came down after the first regular "buck jump." A cheer came from the spectators, who were really pleased to see his success, and hoped he might yet overcome his extremely doubtful mount.

But the fierce blood of the racehorse that never won a race when he was heavily backed was now aroused in Highflyer, all his apparent docility notwithstanding. It was the first real contest he had been engaged in, and all who understood the symptoms watched earnestly in silence. Without a second's respite the frantic brute rose on his hind-legs, and so nearly fell backwards that Marguerite uttered a cry of terror. Bending forward, however, the rider threw his balance in the right direction, and once more Highflyer stood trembling with rage and fear in a natural position.

Mr. Stanhope began to think that the tales he had heard about buckjumping were exaggerated, when the colt made a wilder plunge than any previous one, at the same time dashing his head forward to the earth, after a fashion which nearly unsettled Mr. Stanhope's seat in a vain attempt to hold him up. All previous action was a joke to the terrific rapidity and variety of the attempts which he made to unseat his rider. Astonishing side-leaps, which necessitated a different degree of muscular exertion and balance on Mr. Stanhope's part, succeeded wild plunges, "props," bucks, rearings, and kickings, all apparently at one and the same moment, the whole without a moment's intermission, began to cause Mr. Stanhope's breath to come fast and his head to feel dizzy. The horse seemed to move like an automaton wound up to a

particular pitch of frenzied contortions, unable to stop before the close of the allotted period. His rider was just on the point of hoping that he had succeeded in tiring him out, when one desperate lurch dragged him forward in the saddle, leaving him a little off his balance.

The next moment he felt himself pitched violently over the horse's head; and as he rolled over, he was conscious of a sort of devil's tattoo being performed by Highflyer's hoofs in close and dangerous proximity to his face. This was caused by that insatiable animal's efforts to knock the bit out of his mouth with his fore-legs.

"Well, he is a savage brute," said Isabel, in justly indignant tones; "he really ought to be shot. Oh, Mr. Stanhope! you rode him splendidly. You would have won the bet with any decent horse. You only want a little more practice to ride anything."

"Must suwwendah my sword," said that gentleman, advancing with but little abatement of his usual coolness of demeanour; "lost my money fairly. Too many faw me, just at pwesent."

"But you aren't hurt, are you?" said Isabel, eagerly. "I was afraid the wretch would brain you with his fore-legs, he was quite close enough."

"Spwained my wist, that's all the damage, or I think I'd twy again; a twifle shaken as well. No, William," he said, as Staunton, having caught the redoubtable Highflyer, was walking him up and down. "I'll give you anothah fivah, if you'll wide him. Just faw the lesson, you know. Learn all I can while I'm about it."

"Certainly, sir; glad to see you're not hurt," said Bill, affably and respectfully; "never saw a home gentleman ride so stunning before. Of course, now you've 'monkeyed' him, George could ride him, or any one, in a manner of speaking."

George here looked over with a guilty and abashed countenance, knowing full well that he stood convicted in the eyes of his contemporaries of having "run" (that is, helped artfully to persuade) the new-chum gentleman to believe that the colt would do nothing vicious—and had thereby risked his life.

"I won't get on 'im, Bill," he exclaimed; "not to-day, any road. I didn't think he was such a nut, I didn't raly."

Bill looked contemptuously at him, but refrained from speaking, and proceeded at once to shorten the stirrups and mount. As he moved up to Highflyer's shoulder the same expression of nervous terror came into the horse's countenance, presaging a repetition of misconduct. Staunton did not attempt any method of conciliation; but taking hold of his ear, held it and the shortened bridle rein in his left hand with a vice-like grasp, the pain of which caused the animal to cringe slightly, and prevented him from moving.

Taking hold of the side of the pommel with his right hand, Mr. William slipped easily into the saddle, and was perfectly ready as he drew the bridle rein and released Highflyer's ear with one and the same motion, as the uncongenial animal snorted and plunged forward.

Here was seen the difference of seat and horsemanship, born of years of practice in the particular department of equitation. He did not sit back, he even leaned slightly forward, keeping a short and close haul on the rein, and swaying with each movement. It appeared too as if there were some invisible counter-check on the part of the horseman which prevented the still desperate animal from carrying out his frantic motions to the end. He still ran the old gamut of instinctive and violent paroxysms, by which he sought to disencumber himself of his human burden, but with each parry, as it were, his defence became less savagely obstinate.

During the whole time, it was a marvel to see how each movement was calculated and followed by the matchless roughrider, whose lithe frame moved like a portion of the animal he bestrode. Finally, as Highflyer began to show signs of capitulation and partial fatigue, the observant William struck the spurs into him, gave a shout, and succeeded in forcing the unwilling animal into a canter out of the gate and round an adjoining paddock, bringing him in apparently quite subdued, and carrying himself like an old horse.

"Thought I could wide," said the Honourable, faintly,

"befaw I came to Auswaliah; nevah say so again, give you my hon-ah. Must begin again, and appoint William my widing-mastah."

Mr. Stanhope did not altogether relinquish his interest in Highflyer, his first untoward adventure notwithstanding. He, however, gratefully accepted any hints which Staunton proffered, and became possessed of more than one "wrinkle" with respect to the art and mystery of colt-breaking. So guided and aided, he learned how to subdue the too sensitive, reckless nature of the colt, and able to ride him regularly without more than an occasional trial of strength and sudden, inexplicable outburst of temper. He however never suggested to Isabel to make a trial of him as a lady's horse—smooth, fast, and safe as he was in all his paces. He had also the added experience of seeing Highflyer's sister, Juanita, the one whose vagaries had led to his bet with Staunton, put into harness.

Mr. Baldhill, admiring her size and figure, thought she might be tried in the brake, as, if she "took to the collar," it would enhance her value. This being done with great caution, she reared up and fell upon her back, the first time; on the second trial she nearly kicked the brake-horse's ribs in, and lamed that valuable animal temporarily. After these feats it was decided to send her to Sydney with the next draft of horses for sale, and that Highflyer should accompany her, both horses to be sold without warranty.

After these practical experiments, both Mr. Stanhope and Sir John were observed to speak with reserve about the Australian horse question, admitting freely that there were certain aspects of the subject to which extended experience seemed necessary.

. . . . . .

Christmas had come and gone—a season of restful home pleasures, and rational recreations; of utter freedom from care or anxiety, of thought for the morrow, or dread of the future. Such was its significance to nearly all the dwellers of Merradoolah during the last remnant of the year in which they had seen so many and various adventures, whether by land and sea, on the banks of the ancient river, or in the heart of the eternal desert.

Glowing hot as was the summer land in which they were now placed, partly from choice, partly from necessity, yet was there such a well-ordered course of life that all felt the days as one followed the other in dreamy repose to be days of peace and happiness, filled with gladness, and as far removed from the shadow of evil as from the Djinns of the Arab.

The house itself, with its broad, vine-trellised verandah, was cool, shaded, and well-ventilated. The mornings were fresh and cool before breakfast, when the men of the family chiefly elected to swim in the calm waters of the Cowall, finding the grapes which hung in such countless clusters about the trellised pathways to be exceedingly gratifying as they returned to their rooms to dress. The scent of the orange blossoms was fragrant in that early hour, and the laden peach and apricot invited the most fastidious saunterer.

Breakfast was a joyous and an animated meal, at which Isabel and Marie always appeared in refreshingly cool toilettes, while their piquant conversation effectually prevented the presence of any form of *ennui*. Every one seemed to be healthful, vigorous, and charged with vitality to an extent which gave the whole party something of the gay spirits of holiday-enjoying children.

In an enclosure close to the house, which had been fenced in specially for the purpose, Isabel's gazelles and Aden sheep roamed about; the former being the objects of admiration to all visitors, great and small, who came to Merradoolah, and the latter of undisguised wonder and amazement.

"I wonder what the New Year will bring forth?" said Isabel, toying with her grapes one decidedly hot morning, a bunch of muscatels and a glass of water having composed part of her breakfast. "It seems almost a pity to go away from this dear old place, but I suppose it's our duty to go to the seaside, when it's easily reached and there are no Bedaween between. I feel as if we could go on here for ever—with Sir John and Mr. Stanhope to read to us in the library every morning, and such lovely rides and drives in the evenings. 'Why should we roam? We will go home no more,' as the Lotus-eaters sang—only

we are at home in one sense here. If Bruce Allerton were here, it would be quite perfect. I wonder if he'll come and see us in Sydney? But I fully expected him to be here for Christmas."

Various answers and rejoinders arose at this somewhat disjointed monologue of Isabel's, and despite of her regrets, it came to pass that one day the four-in-hand was put into requisition for the return journey, and the following day beheld them once more within wave sound.

CHAPTER XLVIII

SYDNEY once more! And New Year's eve!

Again the strong sweet breath of the ocean. Again at dawn and eve the sea-nymph's whispering tones, with tales of tropic isles and coral reefs, of palm-shaded bowers amid the purple main; of dread polar kingdoms, and endless ice wastes, where Death sits enthroned amid the unending days, illumed by midnight suns and sleepless stars; of castaways gaunt and grim, of drowned men with staring eyes. Oh! the wondrous love and dread, the mystery and the marvel of "that most ancient, thrilling, haunting melody, the Song of the Sea."

To these they listened hour by hour as they sat—Isabel and Marguerite with their friends of the old land—on the broad verandah overlooking the waveless mirror of the bay, while around them were all sweetest scents, all brightest blooms, mingled with a subtle, encircling atmosphere, aromatic yet stimulating.

"This is the heavenly paradise of which the poet sings," said Marguerite, as they sat, as was their wont, one balmy night on the verandah, and listened to the low murmurous surge-voices in the bay below. "I cannot imagine existence passing in a more delicious, dreamy fashion than with a succession of days and nights like this. I never realised before what a counterpoise

a climate like this might afford to all human woe. It is an anodyne, an atmospheric Lethe, granted to assuage the agonies of mankind—to lighten that dark despair into which weak souls so often fall."

"Why, you'll become quite Australian by and by," said Isabel; "don't you think so, Sir John? Are you going to be converted too, and settle down on the plains? I'll pick you out wives, and nice ones too. I'm afraid Mr. Stanhope will be harder to suit."

"Leave myself in your hands, litewally and personally," said that gentleman. "Pahaps you'll take pity on me yourself, Miss Baldhill? Learn to wide in time, you know. Pick up colonial expewience by degwees."

"That's not what I meant, Mr. Stanhope, and you know it. So don't pay me foolish compliments. You know we're friends and comrades—fellow soldiers, and all that. By the by, *The Battle of the Nile* is coming out next week. I've nearly worn out my eyes correcting the proofs. I feel too anxious to sleep almost. I've got a splendid sketch of the encounter, done by that traitor, Bruce Allerton. I've a great mind to order Gholab to take off his head when he does come; it must be a convenient Eastern fashion. And I've got a full-length picture of my darling Zohrab. He shall go down to immortality at any rate."

"I feel inclined to buy up the edition to distribute among my friends in England," said Sir John. "I shall never appear so favourably in print again as long as I live."

"Wecord of our wandewings in the wildahness," said Mr. Stanhope. "Wildly intewesting. Believe it will wival the *Voyage of the Sunbeam* in circulation."

"Did you ever read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Mr. Stanhope?" demanded Isabel.

"Wevelled in it, in my infancy."

"Then you remember a character called the Flatterer—society man of the day, I suppose?"

"Wevewently wesigned to your webuke," said the Honourable, penitently. "Fwozen twuth, nevahtheless, as our Amewican fwiends say."

"Don't you dare to trifle with my self-respect as an artist again, then," said the fiery maiden, "or I'll take

you out of the second edition and fill up with Arab slave dealers and all the rest of it."

"How is our friend Gordon getting on all this time?" asked Sir John, running a herring conversationally across the trail. "Wolseley got to Khartoum yet?"

"The last news is reassuring," said Isabel, joyfully. "The advance camel-corps has got as far as Ambuhol. the Mahdi's troops are sick, and in revolt. I am full of hope that all will be well in a few weeks, and our hero return to us triumphantly."

"I don't think he ought ever to be let out of England again," said Marguerite; "the strain upon the national mind is too great. Is it not wonderful that one man's fortune should have the power to stir the universal heart of Britain so deeply?"

"A man of his calibre is only born once in a generation, perhaps in a century," said Isabel. "It says much for the *morale* of the nation, that the people instinctively recognise him when he appears, and have not forgotten the old faith of hero-worship. However, we shall see what the morrow brings forth, for the English mail will be delivered at breakfast time."

"Is the fateful hour so close at hand?" said Sir John. "Who knows how our lives may be influenced? I expect a budget of letters, and Bertie is in a state of mild impatience, though he disdains to show it."

"Let us hope all our news may be good," said Isabel.

"Mrs. Mortimer, do you expect letters?"

"I can hardly say that I do," she replied. "But they may come nevertheless. If I believed in presentiments, I should say I have had a foreshadowing of a stage in my destiny. Whether it be for good or evil, I cannot tell."

Long after her companions had retired, Marguerite Gordon sat on the balcony which rose before her bedroom window apparently absorbed in thought. A feeling of deep, almost uncontrollable depression seemed to have taken hold of her every feeling.

Doubt and dread, an indefinable horror and darkness of soul, seemed to penetrate and envelop her whole

being. Long-forgotten scenes passed before her in vivid presentation, which seemed as if they could not be wholly unreal. Again she saw, as in a vision—the while her eyes were open and her bodily senses in abeyance, as those of a somnambulist—her husband and her children, the home which had once been hers, that abode of unquestioning love, of all that a woman holds dearest in her inmost heart. She was conscious that although no act of volition on her part had tended to sever these holy ties—those natural, inalienable sacraments—the circumstances of her new life had caused their outlines to become somewhat blurred and faded, as though the car of fate had borne her farther off in mental as in corporeal attributes.

What was to be the end of her soul's tragedy? and would the final act be played in a theatre of this world or the next? As the bells of the various churches chimed, now fitfully, now all in unison, upon the calm untroubled air of the midsummer night, it seemed to her, with each recurring harmony, as if angels and demons were contending for the souls of those who, like herself, were overburdened by mysterious trials—the unuttered oracles, the enigmas of human life and passion. Which would gain the victory? How doubtful at times seemed the answer. Would the spirit, arising purified from all earthly trials, from the furnace of affliction, the scourge of adversity—gradually free itself from all trace of earthly dross, to stand radiant and serene before the throne of God? As this thought traversed her excited brain a wave of consolation appeared to dominate every pulse of her being, thrilling and yet soothing each nerve-centre. The bells once more seemed to join in one melodious triumphant peal of thanksgiving, when with soft reverent footsteps, as over holy ground, Marguerite sought her apartment and relieved her laden heart with long and passionate prayer. As it ended, the chimes which announced the birth of the New Year burst into harmonious clangour.

At length, fatigued by the mental *travail* which she had undergone, Marguerite Gordon slept soundly—not awakening, in fact, until the dressing bell—which at the half-hour summoned all visitors in Mr. Baldhill's

household to their preliminary duties—had given them the signal.

She had just completed her toilette when a knock was heard at her door, and Isabel, bearing the loveliest of bouquets, and looking as fresh as a rose herself, entered the room.

"All happiness in the coming year, my dearest Mrs. Mortimer," the girl said. "May it be a happy year for you and yours, for all of us! I really believe in omens, and it has opened propitiously. Papa is in great spirits. They have had rain in that back country of his, from which they nearly had to bring the sheep away. Bruce Allerton has turned up, on his way to New Zealand, and is coming to dine to-night. Mother's gigantic lily has bloomed a perfect wonder, and there is a letter for you, an English one. If your news is good, you dear, we shall be a happy family indeed."

"May God in His mercy grant it, my darling Isabel," said Marguerite, whose heart was full almost to bursting with contending emotions. "Happiness and I have long been strangers; but it may be that the after years will be less unkind. Whatever peace and comparative freedom from morbid grief I have enjoyed has been due to your good parents and yourself."

"And I hope we shall never be separated all our lives," replied the girl, with deep emotion. "That's the worst of getting so desperately fond of people; it tears up your heart-strings when you are parted. I don't intend to 'pay out,' as the sailors say, any more of my more valuable emotions for the future. But let us all have breakfast first, and we'll go into mother's morning-room, and read our letters luxuriously afterwards."

Marguerite was not unwilling to delay the shock of which the letter mentioned by Isabel might be the unsuspected herald until, fortified by the splendour of the southern morn, her spirit had regained its usual serenity. She obeyed the laughing girl's behest, and with her entered the breakfast-room, where the rest of the household were already assembled.

"No wonder that people have happy new years, and old years too, in this part of the world," said Sir John,

waving his hand toward the oriel window, which commanded a full view of the bay beneath them and the harbour. "How can people be unhappy, or anything but virtuous and high-minded, with such a glorious panorama ever before their eyes?"

"*Vous avez waison*, as that French friend of yours at Galle used to say," said the Honourable. "If I had been bwought up amid such suwwoundings, I should have been a wegulah Admiwable Cwichton—feel confident of it. That's why Miss Isabel—but, I wemembah, compliments are contwaband, and liable to confiscation. Can't help contwibuting my mite to Jack's poetical impwomptu—cawwies me back to my happy childhood."

There was much excuse for the enthusiasm of Sir John Danvers and his friend. Less observant natures might have been stirred by the varied glories of sea and sunlight, of grove and shining sands, of a view unrivalled for effective combination of the charms of Nature in all the freshness of her wild untrammelled garb, yet contrasted with the vast results of civilisation, the miracles of science, the triumph of art.

Before them lay the unstirred waters of the bay, dotted with every variety of sail and steam, flag and pennant. White-winged skiffs, gliding from the innumerable inlets, appeared to emerge from recesses amid the wood-crowned heights, the slopes of which were covered with white walled villas and mansions; gardens like their own crowded with exotics from every southern clime, and though profuse and apparently dense of growth, yet most carefully and scientifically tended. A huge ironclad, with a brace of frigates at no great distance, lying calmly majestic upon the slumbering wave, showed that England's farthest outposts are carefully guarded by the Empress of the Seas. Below the garden, a schooner from the islands had anchored in the night—a trim, low-hulled, long-sparred clipper—her stern and rigging hung with bananas and pineapples, while dark faces were peering over the side at the wonders of the great City of the South, of which they had heard so much from missionary and trader, sailor and beach-comber.

"What a contrast to our British New Year's Day," said Sir John, "with its snow and ice, melancholy trees, and death-like, shrouded landscape! I don't intend to run down the dear old country, but, somehow, one seems to prefer this. I expect my people will find me rather altered in tastes—spoiled, they will call it—when I return."

"Don't think I'll evah weturn," said Mr. Stanhope. "It will be like turning out of pawadise into the aw—world of twial and pwosaic westwaint."

"You are all going to turn out of this extremely pleasant, breakfast, dawdling room, and undertake the duty of reading your letters this minute," interposed Isabel, decidedly. "I hope there will be nothing intolerably prosaic about them."

A general departure was made, and as each person appropriated his or her budget it was evident that the suggestion but anticipated general opinion. Each recipient selected a suitable lounge, and commenced to decipher the half-desired, half-feared messages from afar.

As Marguerite recognised, amid a shower of post-marks and addresses, the characteristic hand of Madame Faucher, she instinctively offered a silent prayer before, with eager, tremulous hands, she tore open the envelope. Well might her heart beat tumultuously, and then arrest its life-current until her cheek was blanched and her brain became a vacuum, after she had glanced at the first page! Well might her steps falter as she rose hastily and retreated to her room; for this was the home picture that Madame Faucher's clear-cut, minute caligraphy exhibited:

"LONDON, *November 7th*, 1884.

"O LOVED AND HONOURED FRIEND,—

"Were it that you were doomed to drag out the remainder of existence in exile, in that far off Galles du Sud so remote from civilised parts, unhonoured and unknown in thy sainted martyrdom, I should despair of the mercy, the justice of *le bon Dieu*. My *directeur* has in vain rebuked me for my doubt of Providence. He has ever warned me that my unbelief would provoke the anger of the Church. I have, in effect, resisted Him.

I am now—may He pardon me—a penitent and undoubting believer. I trace His hand in the shaping of your destiny. You are required *in your own house;* your successor—she who has filled your place in the heart, in the home which belongs to you of right—of necessity vacates her place. Madame Mariana Gordone —how the title must have pierced your devoted heart again and again!—is dying. I have seen her. I composed a pious fiction—a case of distress. She is *une ange de charité.* I saw enough. The consumption —your great English destroyer—has seized upon her. A hollow cough shakes her pitiably. All the doctors have condemned her. If you wish to see her alive you will hasten back, losing not a day, not an hour. I send you an exchange—what you call it, authorisation —to draw on me for passage *monnaie*, in the case that you have not so much in your bureau. You will repay me in the aftertime. Monsieur Gordone *naturellement* is plunged into grief. The children are sad to behold. The household is desolated. Were it but to aid these distressed and helpless ones, you will fly to them. Is it not so? I can figure to myself your instant resolve. You will close the eyes of her who has so dutifully, so innocently, supplanted you. You will dry the tears of the orphans. You will console him who has been so true to your memory, and yet in act false through a terrible error. And that *le bon Dieu* will yet spare you years of peace, of honour, of happiness, prays your faithful friend,

"CELINE FAUCHER."

A revelation! A message as from the tomb! A dread and awful citation to the death-bed of her rival, all innocent, loving, reverently cherishing her own memory, as she had ever been! And now the Death Angel had in truth and fact hurled the fatal darts which he had but threateningly poised at her. The letter dropped from her cold hands, to be recovered, read, and re-read with tears and sobs, sighs and groans, as though it were a renewal of her own doom which she was lamenting.

In all her endless musings and recapitulations of the

possible and probable terminations of their involved condition she had never contemplated the death of Mariana. She apparently possessed the placid constitution, mental and physical, which ensures its possessor a long life, a tranquil, slowly-fading age; other people might become ill, might fail in mind or body, might suddenly pass away, and it seemed but a part of the world's daily routine; but that Mariana should perish in the flower of her womanhood was a contingency that had never crossed her thoughts.

And now she lay dying! Her informant was not a person to be deceived or to miscalculate. A chance cold, contracted in the bitter winter during an errand of mercy to a starving family, had struck deeply into the vital organs. A latent taint of consumption in the constitution had been developed. There was no hope. She pictured Mariana—her bright hair tossed in disorder over her pillows—lying on the couch from which she was never to rise. She could bring before her the mute despair of her husband—of their husband. Great God! How she longed to stand by his side and comfort him in his bitter grief. He might not, could not sorrow for Mariana as, in his first agony, he had sorrowed for her. But was it in nature that his heart should not be rent to the very core as he watched the lingering death of the fair creature who had lain on his bosom for years, had been the light of his hearth, the mother of his children, who had cherished no earthly thoughts but those of love and duty for him and his? And when she, Marguerite Gordon, as if risen from the dead, stood like an apparition in the household, what would be his feelings—what those of Mariana?

The acme of doubt and anxiety, of hope, fear, and regret, had been reached as these conflicting thoughts rushed through her overcharged brain. She fell forward on the floor, when total unconsciousness forbade further torture—perhaps mercifully preserved her reason.

CHAPTER XLIX

HOURS had passed before Marguerite Gordon had recovered sufficiently to form plans for her future guidance or calmly contemplate the necessity of action. Unable to bear the idea of joining the family circle, she sent for Mrs. Baldhill, resolved to confide fully in that shrewd but kindly matron.

"And so, you poor dear," said her listener, after a recital broken by sobs, which seemed to be the outflow of years of pent-up misery, "all this time you have been turned out of house and home, driven away from your husband and children, and all through no fault of your own? We know enough of you to be sure of that. How you could have left him and her to be happy together, and you out in the cold, I can't think. I wouldn't, I know—not for a thousand cousins and husbands—let alone children and friends. But I dare say it's all for the best; and now, as things have changed, you'd better start by the mail steamer on Thursday. Mrs. Romer and her children are going home in her. You know her a little, and she's just the person you'd like to be with and make a friend of. No; don't come down to-night. You want rest and quiet. I'll tell my old man and Isabel, in a general way. To-morrow morning you'll be stronger, and we'll help you pack. Mr. Baldhill will take your passage and all that, so don't you bother yourself. You've enough to think of," and with a maternal and sympathetic kiss the worthy dame departed.

She lost no time in announcing as much of the facts to the company as she deemed it necessary for them to know. "Poor dear Mrs. Mortimer had bad news of her family at home. A relation of hers given over by the doctors; she might linger on for months yet, so she thinks it best to go home to her at once. She means to start in the *Aden* on Thursday."

This statement fell like a shell into the midst of the party assembled at dinner. They had been by this time joined by Bruce Allerton, now on his way to New Zea-

land, but who had so far remained true to his allegiance to the Baldhill family as to pay a flying visit in passing. Still shaken by his disappointment, he dreaded the sight of the woman who had so fascinated and enthralled him. Her image had never since been absent from his thoughts. But he was unwilling to risk any misconstruction of his conduct, which a persistent absence from the Baldhills' society might occasion. He had, therefore, resolved to pay at least a short visit before he took refuge, amid the picturesque forests and geysers of New Zealand, from the Australian summer and his own thoughts.

He was extremely surprised at Mrs. Mortimer's communication, which fell upon him with all the suddenness with which we receive tidings of an altogether undreamed of change in the destiny of those who have made themselves a portion of our lives. He, however, concealed his emotion, and left to Isabel the task of expressing the surprise which every one more or less felt.

"I never was so astonished at anything in my life," said she. "Somehow, I got it into my head that Mrs. Mortimer was going to stop with us for ever and ever. She is such a dear, sweet creature, and suits us all so wonderfully, that I don't know what we shall do without her. Mother would die of a broken heart, I believe, if she hadn't dad to cheer her up a little. I shall feel a kind of orphan, or more nearly as if I had lost an elder sister. All my naturally bad disposition will come out when I have no one to quell my evil passions. So wisely and gently as she always did it, too! How we shall miss her!"

"Gweat mind to go home too," said the Honourable Bertie. "Wants some one to look after her on board ship, p'waps. First bweak up of our party, too. I had a dweadful pwesentiment last week; now it comes twue."

"The best thing you and Sir John can do is to go with Mr. Allerton to New Zealand. You'll never have a better chance of seeing that lovely country," said Isabel. "He doesn't look over well either. Lost his spirits. Is it the old wound, Bruce, do you think?"

"I'm afraid it is," he hastily assented, pleased to avail himself of the easy opening thus unconsciously offered. "The hot weather doesn't suit me as well as in old days. But what will you do if every one goes away? You'll be horribly lonely."

"Never mind me, perhaps it will do me good to be *en retraite* for a while. Dad can't leave his business this year. It's setting in dry, he thinks, and there may be trouble with the stock. At any rate, I've had excitement enough—we've all had—for a while, and I'm going to see if I can't do the calm, unruffled home-life, path-of-duty business, and all that, for a year."

The next day was one compounded in equal parts of leave-taking, hurried recollections, and confused fears of forgetting matters of importance.

These trifles mingle with the gravest solemnities, which precede, in most cases, the journey to a far country.

Isabel would be one moment sobbing in Marguerite's arms, and the next hurrying to and fro, kneeling beside trunks or insisting upon pressing some fresh token of remembrance upon her departing friend. Much was done, however, in those hours of concentrated energy, and on the same morning that the *Aden* cleared the Heads and moved majestically through the calm waters of a summer sea, the *Rotomahana* sailed for New Zealand, having among her list of passengers Bruce Allerton, Esq., Sir John Danvers, and The Honourable Mr. Stanhope.

Ere these important events and destinations became fully transacted, Bruce Allerton found opportunity for a last conversation with Marguerite.

"I can't help divining," he said, looking into the tear-dimmed eyes, "that no ordinary tidings have so shaken you. I, who know every change in your features, see clearly that the inmost recesses of your heart have been rent. Is there anything I can do in this strait which a brother could offer? My feelings are—will ever be—unchangeable. Yet, once again, can these events in any way affect your decision? Now or in the future, is there hope for me?"

He bent his eyes earnestly upon her; he took her

hand mechanically; his whole frame was trembling with eagerness; his expression and bearing those of a man who listens for the sentence which dooms to death or restores to life and rapture.

"I do full justice—all honour," she said, "to the loyalty of your love. Why should I affect to employ another name? But it cannot be, nor could have been. More than that, we both have reason to rejoice that my resolve remained unshaken—aye, to our dying day. When I tell you that my husband was living then—still lives, thank God!—I need add nothing but that our compulsory separation was without blame to either. Some day you shall know all. Meanwhile I have confided in Mrs. Baldhill; she is in possession of my sad story."

"You have told me much," he said, "more than is needed. I should never have connected your life-history with the faintest shadow of blame. Whatever happens to us, you have raised all womanhood in my eyes. You will remain enshrined in my heart the exemplar, the ideal of perfect womanhood."

"If it be so," she said, while the tears stood in her eyes as each tone of his low, vibrating voice fell on her ear, "will you give me proof by following the counsel I give you? Not for a while, perhaps, but when Time has effected his usual cure. Nay, do not shake your head. I am older in the world's ways, at least, than you, and I speak as I have seen. Promise me that you will give heed to the truest friend you have in the world."

"I promise, without limitation," he said, bowing low. "You can ask nothing which I will not cheerfully fulfil. Order as you will my future life—the fragment, at least, which is left of it."

"I will not order, and I cannot with a clear conscience ensure your doing my behest; but could I do so, I would say, 'Marry Isabel Baldhill.'"

Bruce Allerton started. He seemed about to speak, but he uttered no sound.

"I mean what I say," she continued impressively, "and the day will come when you will bless me for these words. A man thinks in the first despair of loss

that he can never love more, nor endure life. As well might the leafless oak refuse the buds of springtime. There is an aftermath with men, however it may be with our more emotional sex. And with a tender-hearted, loving woman devoted to him, any man, the best man living, may be, aye, has been happy. He resigns himself to a serene, satisfying existence, filled with affection and repose. Is life so joyous that a man can disregard such a fate?"

"Isabel is a happy child," he said at length; "I am a world-weary, disappointed man, chilled with the failure of my life's brightest aspirations. Would not her happiness be wrecked in an unavailing effort to float a foundering barque?"

"I will take the risk of that. I know you both too well to doubt the result. She is no child now, but a sweet, pure-minded, high-souled woman. She loves you, Bruce Allerton, with the unconscious idolatry of a girl's fresh heart. Do as I say, and the dream of her life will be fulfilled. She will be to you a peerless wife, and you—yes, little as you think it now—will be a happy man. I who speak have seen the hazard tried—have watched the issue. Her life is almost in your hands. Will you hold back at the bidding of sensations which one day you will regard as phantasms and chimeras?"

"I would do much," he said at length, "so that I might say to myself in after years, 'I did her bidding. It was she who thus moulded my life.' I will prove worthy of you and my better self. But not yet, not yet."

"There is no need; you are leaving her native land for a season of travel. Protract your absence till your soul's health is re-established. She will remain steadfast. You little know her if you doubt her constancy. On that day you will find her heart drawn instinctively towards yours."

"May you not be mistaken? Can one woman answer for another undoubtingly?"

"I would answer for her with my own life," she said. "I know each thought of her inmost heart. Were it not for her future happiness this should never

have been divulged. But the confidence is sacred between us."

"Every word from your lips is, for me, sacred as of old were the oracles of the gods. Since you have willed it, it shall be so, and no thought of mine shall run counter to its accomplishment. And now, sweetest, fairest, dearest of womankind, farewell! If we meet no more, think of me as of one whose whole existence you have swayed. Trust me, I do not wholly forget." He bent low over her hand, then raised it reverently to his lips, and left her presence like one who renounces the light and colour of existence for the drear monotony of a monastery.

Mr. Baldhill, with habitual liberality, had insisted upon paying Marguerite's passage in the mail steamer and providing for all necessary expenses in England, as well as for the return voyage. She went on board the *Aden* with those kindly, steadfast friends, and indeed felt something like the desolation of spirit which accompanies quitting home when she parted from them and found herself alone with the lady to whose kind offices she had been recommended. Isabel was inconsolable, and, indeed, completely broke down at the parting moment, notwithstanding her usual firmness and indisposition to create scenes.

"I shall never have a friend like you again," she sobbed out. "I don't know any other woman in the whole world that I'd knuckle down uncomplainingly to as I've done to you. It's seeing the self-command you practise, I suppose. I shall be very lonely too. There's those dear Englishmen and Bruce Allerton gone, though he's hardly a friend now. I can't quite make him out. However, I'm determined to work like a Trojan, or a Girton girl, at any rate, and improve myself. That's the best way to drown care and please you, isn't it?"

"That's my own Isabel," said Marguerite; "you promised to think of my words when I was far away. Do what you know to be right, and trust in that Divine mercy which, in spite of our hardness of heart and unbelief, will yet save us in our need."

The girl threw herself upon Marguerite's bosom. After one long, clinging embrace, she raised her head,

and with a sorrowful gaze in her bright, tear-bedewed face the friends parted.

. . . . .

Again the long eventless days, the endless wave and sky, the storm and sunshine of the restless, wondrous main! As they neared Europe they realised in the wrath of ocean their proximity to the icy North. Marguerite's heart commenced to pulsate more irregularly as one by one the uncertainties of her new position forced themselves upon her. Again and again she pictured to herself her former home, with its inmates, under the conditions in which she would return. Would she arrive in time to close Mariana's eyes? How should comforting words be spoken to him in his sore need? And who would speak them so that consolation should follow? Or would he hear her message with shocked surprise, with mortal terror at the appearance of one raised from the dead?

How should she act? In what way secure the privilege of aiding these loved ones in their sore need, at the same time guarding against the inevitable shock, which might prove fatal to Mariana?

Day after day she revolved these doubts, anxious fears, terrible uncertainties. A slender, yet still distinctly-defined hope would also arise in her breast that she might yet be all in all to the man she loved, to the children of her youth—bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. The anticipation seemed too nearly allied to a beatific vision to be fulfilled on earth. And day by day, assailed by these tempestuous thoughts, the cheek of Marguerite Gordon grew pale and yet more pale until, on their arrival at Marseilles, but for the firmness of her step and the elasticity of her frame, she might almost have passed for the invalid that had quitted the dreary hospital of *Le Saint Jacques* five years before.

"I never saw any one fall away as you have done lately," said Mrs. Romer to her, in the long-looked-forward-to railway journey to Paris. "Your appetite has improved in this cold weather, but you are getting thinner daily. One would think that you expected misery of all kinds to meet you in England. So different

from most people's anticipations. Whatever is the matter with you?"

"It must be the cold weather which does not agree with me after the hot climates in which we have been living lately," she replied. "Associations unspeakably mournful are connected with this Marseilles Railway line in my mind. Perhaps at Paris I may recover a little more tone."

As the train glided by the well-remembered route the soul of Marguerite Gordon, laden with sad memories, as of a former state of existence, sank into darkest depths of despair.

The very air, bitterly cold and striking every sense with almost polar severity of temperature after the sun-bright skies of the South, seemed filled with sorrow, agony, and death. The ghosts of the victims of the collision, pale and blood-streaked, writhing or motionless, seemed to shriek and moan amid the wintry blasts which wailed through the leafless trees.

The desolation of nature revived afresh the terrible trials, the unutterable agonies, through which soul and body had passed in that time of dread. Truly, it was a purgatory endured on earth for some wise purpose of Eternal Mercy!

And would not her spirit be blessed with compensating joy, even here below? Might not she be restored to the heaven of love and peace from which she had been so violently reft? She had suffered and been strong so far. Surely now she could endure to the end?

Shuddering and all tremulous, as one who stands safely on the farther brink of an abyss, Marguerite Gordon humbly committed her future lot into the hands of the Supreme Ruler of our destinies, and with a recovered sense of peace and steadfastness of purpose awaited His disposition of her fate.

In any case, she felt assured of her ability, as of her desire, to devote herself to the welfare of the mourning household which she would so soon re-enter. In despite of the mental disturbances through which she had so lately passed and their temporary effects, she knew that the reserve of strength and endurance acquired

beneath the benign skies on which the Southern Cross looks down could be drawn upon at need. And as the tidal steamer neared the historic cliffs of Albion, she felt conscious of power to confront the coming situation, whatever it might be.

CHAPTER L

MARGUERITE GORDON'S first visit was paid to Madame Faucher. She had been a staunch friend, an indispensable ally. Whatever minor defections from the ideal standard might be laid to her charge, no one could accuse her of not being a steadfast patroness, a brave and persistent comrade, as indeed she was a bitter and somewhat unscrupulous enemy. Marguerite Gordon was one of the few persons for whom she cherished an enthusiastic admiration. Her firmness under trials, her endurance of unmerited misfortune, her patient dignity, had aroused whatever poetical instincts the worldly-wise *Parisienne* had in her composition. In friendship, as in war, she was not one to rest satisfied with half-measures.

Marguerite's reception by her was warm—even enthusiastic—to a degree which would have astonished some of her oldest lodgers, who held that she was incapable of strong emotion which had not a pecuniary basis.

"So behold you of return!" she cried, after an embrace prolonged and unprecedentedly fervid. "You come but to assist at the funeral obsequies of *cette chère* Mariana. She lingers still, she is of an angelic piety, she is resigned to the will of heaven; but when she thinks of her children, of her—of Monsieur, she is overcome. But what will you? She does not know whom *le bon Dieu* has sent to her aid."

"I will go this very night. Perhaps it will not be too late; but may God in His mercy pity me! How can I

tell that my presence will not give pain, will not quench the flickering spark of life?"

"It will not be so. I have been there of late—ah! *oui*, these many times. My Parisian tongue pleases Monsieur and her—her. It was the association with madame, as they called you. She speaks with tenderness of you; oh! it is sublime, it is not of this earth. A hundred times I have heard her say were you but there she would die happy. He also calls for you."

"They have not then the faintest idea of whom they speak?" said Marguerite, in a changed voice. "Have they no surprise why I quitted their house, their country?"

"It has been a mystery to both—a grief, an enigma. Their household has never been the same, I have repeatedly heard them say; and therefore you will have your *petit dîner* with me. Our soup, our *entrées* are good, as of old, and you shall then go down to Gordon House. Is it not so?"

"Will they recognise me, do you think? It is not possible, surely. Yet I should like to see her, dear, dear Mariana, before she dies. She may not outlive this night, if it is as you say."

"She will not see the dawn. So said the doctor yesterday; but this day it will be true. I go to the house with you."

It was so arranged. Margaret had perforce to dine. Madame Faucher made so great a point of that ceremony that she could not in common courtesy refuse. Her overwrought feelings had prevented her from considering the question of refreshment. So that, as madame put it, she must choose between dining or fainting.

"But; yes, now that I look at you well," said madame, after the first course had been removed, "you have changed—you are transformed, since I saw you carried away by *la femme* Baldhill—*cette Australienne*. You have sorrowed, but that land of the sun has been a potent restorative; a divine climate doubtless, Marie has said so to me. She wept tears of joy that *le bon* Baldhill goes to make the fortune of Alphonse. And you, *ma chère!* you are again young; you are beautiful. It is a *coup de théâtre*. It is sorcery."

"I have been very well and nearly happy. I am strong and youthful once more — may God be thanked!" said Marguerite. "How little I could have expected to feel as I do in body and mind while she is dying. Dying! I cannot bear the thought of it. Let us end the suspense. I feel as if I could glide through the streets, like a mesmerised subject, over all obstacles and hindrances."

The winter wind was keen. It had been snowing, and the driving sleet struck—death-like and chill—through Marguerite's frame, long accustomed to the balmy air of a summer land. She shivered and trembled as they left the house to enter the cab which had been provided for them.

"Wait but the moment," said madame. "You will perish. Sit yourself in the carriage."

Madame ran back and returned with a thick and handsome fur covering, which, in the dimly-lighted cab, Marguerite, who seemed to be in a condition of dreamy immobility, put on without remark.

Arriving at the house, they were admitted by the servant, whose eyes were swollen by weeping as she replied to Madame Faucher's low inquiry:

"Can't last till daylight, the doctor says. Poor dear missis! And she so young, too!"

Here a voice—the well-known voice of Hugh Gordon, every tone of which thrilled through the heart of his agitated listener—said, "Is that Madame Faucher? Tell her to come here. I have something to say to her."

Madame Faucher tightly closed her clasp upon the hand which Marguerite unresistingly yielded to her. Half-led, half-following, she passed on to the darkened room where Hugh Gordon lay almost in a stupor of grief upon a couch.

"This is so kind of you, Madame Faucher," he said. "But whom have you brought with you?" As he put the question, the door opened, and the light from the hall appeared to flood the apartment, revealing the two figures almost as clearly defined as day.

"It is madame returned—our madame!" he said, with sudden cheerfulness. "The angel in the house.

It is. Ah! My God! Am I already bereft of my senses? or can the grave give up its dead?"

Marguerite stood as if spellbound. She became suddenly conscious from an opposite mirror that she had suffered her friend to wrap her in a sealskin cloak of curiously close similitude to the one so long remembered as her husband's purchase before the collision: as the death shroud of the wearer.

As the actors in the tragedy for which Fate had mercilessly cast them stood regarding one another with awe-stricken countenances, from which the violence and novelty of their emotions had expelled all ordinary expression, what a world of memory, of passion, thrilled the very centres of their being. Madame Faucher stood like the spectator of some great histrionic triumph, as the leader of the chorus in Medea, unwilling by premature movement to disturb the effect of the performance.

But there was a wondrous and subtle difference between the bearing of the protagonists who had thus met under circumstances so unusual as to border upon the supernatural. The face of the man was worn and haggard with grief, with watching, wan almost with the pallor of sickness, wasted with the slow torture of despair. His whole frame was tremulous—his expression nerveless and despondent to the last degree. For the woman, while upon her face shone the light of an infinite pity, an almost divine tenderness, her erect figure exhibited the grace which ever accompanies a full measure of health, with those whom the gods have made beautiful at birth. As for one moment she moved suddenly towards him with resistless impulse, and then arrested her step, his eye appeared to take in with sudden illumination the form and face, the well-remembered pride of bearing—even the garb in which he had last seen her alive, as he believed. His own proud, beauteous, faithful love had been restored to his sight, clearly and freshly outlined, as on the day of parting. Again she stood before him a radiant vision of beauty and grace—an angelic visitant in the days of darkness, in the hour of death.

"You have returned, oh! my lost love," he said at

length, slowly—and his voice sounded hollow and almost unnatural as he strove to regulate his utterances —"to the home where you have been so long, so deeply mourned. I see it all now. Blind and insensate as I was! It would break my heart, were I capable of ordinary feeling how, to think how, with weak, trembling steps, you came to my door and were refused admittance to your own home. Thank God that it was again opened to you, as a loved and honoured guest, though under a feigned name—a tenderly false personation. Thank God that you have come in time! Let us go to Mariana."

She looked appealingly to Madame Faucher. "Think of it, Hugh," she said at once; and the word—his name—so long unuttered, seemed to her, to the hearers, to comprehend in its low, rich cadence a world of tender memories and unforgotten love. "May not my presence—my return——"

"Shock her? Pain her? You little know how the faint glimmering of life's taper will be relumed by this act of God's providence. She has never had you out of her thoughts. In your dual character you are dear to her—loved and mourned beyond the power of speech. Is it not so?"

"Monsieur has reason," the Frenchwoman gravely answered. "She has often spoken of you to me. She has pined for your possible return; it will soothe her last hour. *Allons*," said she, taking the arm of Marguerite. "I see in this the hand of *le bon Dieu*. There is an inspiration in the situation in which we find ourselves."

Together they entered the apartment of the dying woman. She lay on the luxurious couch, upon the adjuncts of which every conceivable means of relief had been lavishly supplied. The bright masses of her silken hair were spread over her pillow, tossed and disordered by the restlessness of pain. The wasted frame, the ashen pallor of the features, the hueless lips were piteous to behold. The lustre of her violet eyes—fever-bright—alone remained undimmed. They shone still with a strangely brilliant glow. The expression of the worn and sharpened features relaxed, and a shadowy smile even wreathed itself around the

pale lips as she saw Madame Faucher; her gaze momentarily brightened as she recognised her husband, and the nerveless hands made a sad, ineffectual motion, as if to beckon him towards her.

But as she caught sight of Marguerite's tall figure standing near her husband, though in part behind him, a mysterious change took place in her expression. Light and colour at once came to the weary face; the wasted frame grew strong. Electrical agency seemed to have freshly vitalised the mysterious interdependent forces of mind and body. She made as if to speak. To the astonishment of Hugh Gordon, she partially raised herself, and then, leaning forward, uttered in a voice of agonised joy, unutterably pathetic and appealing: "It is she! It is Marguerite! God in His great mercy has sent her." She stretched out her thin, white, wasted arms with a feeble, imploring gesture. With a sudden impulsive movement, and features glorified with pity, love, tenderness unspeakable, Marguerite moved swiftly forward, and clasping the sweet wan face, threw herself on her knees by the bedside and sobbed unrestrainedly, while the fingers of the dying woman played with her raven hair, and her voice murmured lovingly, as a weary child on its mother's breast, "Marguerite! Darling Marguerite! I knew you would return."

"Let us leave them," said Madame Faucher in a reverent tone to Hugh Gordon, as she drew him softly through the door. "They have much to tell. Her return has acted like a charm, a tonic the most powerful. Now her soul will be at rest. She knows to what protectress—ah! so noble, so saintly—she goes to confide her infants."

"It is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes," quoted Hugh Gordon from the volume of sacred writ which had been of late his constant companion and poor Mariana's hourly support, alas! in her hour of need. In the flush of prosperity, in the indifferentism of daily life, how neglected, if not contemned, is the Book in which most of us have read at a mother's knee, with lisping speech reciting the most ancient history of the relations of God and man. In the days

of health it perhaps lies unnoticed. But in the sad and lonely hours when the dark wing of the Death Angel casts a shadow over the chamber wherein lies wife or child, sister or brother, how do we flee for comfort, for hope, to the only source for consolation granted on earth to those who trust to meet the loved and lost in Heaven!

When Hugh Gordon returned to her chamber he found Mariana in a state of abnormal mental force and lucidity. Even her bodily powers had increased miraculously in the eyes of those who had watched her labouring breath on the preceding day. An expression of joy and resignation irradiated her features as she lay with her hands clasped in those of Marguerite. A seraphic glow had succeeded to an expression of wistfulness and child-like, unquestioning regret.

"Were we not bewitched, blind, and deaf," she said, in a voice low and enfeebled, but strangely clear and distinct, "that we did not recognise our lost Pleiad, as Hugh loved to call you, when she lived with us day after day? A thousand times you reminded me of Marguerite; but did I not know that she was dead? Had I not seen the tomb, read her name and epitaph? Oh! my poor darling! you that were so proud and stately, so delicately tended, so daintily surrounded, what trials, what miseries have you undergone, and so uncomplainingly! But you are alive now, are you not? Or am I released from earth? Do I behold a saint?"

Here the weakened brain commenced to ramble in unconnected sentences; but with a visible effort she recovered herself.

"Was it not fortunate that we both loved you so? You witnessed our grief. There could be no deceit before you, a stranger, as we thought you; and yet that was the reason, perhaps, that you did not discover yourself. For pity's sake! For love and mercy! Lest I might be hurt and disgraced, or the children shamed —for this you bore poverty, sickness, mean living, the sight of another woman in your own place! And now your day of recompense has come. I shall not be long in your way. But my children, oh, my little ones!" Here the mother's heart overflowed, and her sobs shook

the enfeebled frame. "It is the punishment of sin."

"You loved and cherished mine," Marguerite said, in her low, soft tones, rich with suppressed emotion. "You have nothing to accuse yourself of. There could be no sin when your love was given to the husband of a dead wife with the innocent guilelessness of a child. Do not fear; they shall be the children of my bosom. In that dark hour they shall never miss a mother's love."

"I know it. I heard every word from your lips," she faltered, yet more faintly; "and you love your poor Mariana still; do you not? She never cherished a hard thought of your memory. If she did less than her duty, it was because she was weak. Oh! she loved much, loved much," she repeated, "like the woman in the Bible."

"You have made him happy—happier than I ever thought he could have been when he lost me," whispered Marguerite, pressing her cheek. "For that I honour you. I had no jealousy. God knew of such love. It was the happiness flowing from the companionship of a pure heart, from duty well performed, from unselfish fondness. You are worthy of his, of any man's love. And hard must have been the heart that would have refused it."

When the doctor made his usual visit, he was surprised to mark the general alteration which had taken place in the patient.

He warned Hugh Gordon, however, against entertaining fallacious hopes. "This lady's presence," he said, "is the exciting cause. From some reason great nervous exaltation has supervened. The proximate effect is to protract life in such cases as this. But within forty-eight hours a change must come."

"Let me stay with her," said Marguerite. "I will call Mr. Gordon whenever there is need. I can lie on the side couch. I would not on any account quit her. I am certain she wishes it earnestly."

"Stay with me," she whispered faintly. "I shall not fear death when you are near. You do not know what an intense relief, what a support, your presence

has been to me." Their tears flowed fast together, their hands were clasped. Marguerite's head was bowed over the fair form that was so soon to be clay—cold, speechless, motionless, in the cruel grave. Ah, me! how hard is life. How uncertain the tenure by which the happiest mortals hold their power of love, hope, enjoyment in this world! What terrible sufferings, what racking tortures have ere now afflicted the dear dumb flesh ere the soul quitted the shattered tenement! What can love do but sit with folded arms, or kneel with bowed head over the motionless form, while the chamber appears filled with dread and awful shapes mocking the unutterable anguish and despair of the final hour!

No such dire accompaniments troubled the last hours of Mariana. There was perfect freedom from pain, and until the hour which preceded the great change a wonderful serenity, a calmness almost cheerful. Permitted to see her children daily, at the first opportunity she informed them that madame, whom they loved, whom all had loved so dearly when she was with them, and whom the elder children remembered, had come back, and would stay with them, and love them always, when poor mamma was gone. They looked at her wonderingly, then, after the manner of children, were eager to be petted and tended by the strange lady.

So the hours passed. Hugh Gordon had long, whispered conversations with the dying woman, in which, from both hearts, welled forth the secret thoughts which from that relation only are evolved. "Do not grieve unreasonably for me, my darling," she said. "I have had a part of your heart, I know. I have striven to deserve it. But *she* was your first love, the charm of your youth, the first flower of wedded life. You will be happy once more. Her beauty and grace, her noble nature, will again fill your heart. What other woman would have acted as she has done? If I had known what she kept in her breast, I should have died of shame. Now—may God's holy name be praised!—I die in His good time, and at peace with all the world, with gratitude and love in my heart. I do not grudge you to her—to her alone, of all living

women," she whispered, "now. It is God's will; but oh! my darling, it is hard to bear." Her tears fell fast as her voice broke, and an interval of low, tremulous sobbing succeeded, while Hugh Gordon abandoned himself to the expression of the half-spoken feelings which had grown up during the years of their calm, untroubled existence, and adjured her to believe in his unalterable love and tenderness.

"Then the children! Oh! my little ones," she moaned. "I know that they will receive all love and affection, but what will their position in the eyes of the world be?"

"Neither they nor the world shall ever know, I swear to you," he replied. "It is fortunate that Alister and Rita are so far away. It is my intention to quit England for ever, and adopt as my own the beautiful south land from which Marguerite has come. She will return with our babes—when—when,"—here the strong man bent his head, and once more clasped in his arms that slight form, still so fair. He played with the tangled tresses of her hair as she hid her face in his bosom, while he continued—"as the governess to my children, our re-union, when it formally takes place, in God's good time, will excite no remark. Thus, our children's name, and yours, my gentle darling, may be for ever shielded from blame."

"And she has consented to your plan?" asked Mariana. "It is like her."

"She has even suggested a modification of it," he replied. "We shall not see each other for a year, during which time I shall wind up my affairs, and completely sever my connection with England."

"No other woman in the world would have acted as she did," she murmured, "would have given up her name for the sake of mine. You will love her the more, will you not, for her thought for your poor Mariana? She was always tender and wise for me in our girlhood. How strange that I should feel the old sense of leaning upon her for support, even to the very verge of the grave."

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Ere the next eve, the dread change which the

physician had foreseen occurred. When the spiritual exaltation subsided which had so strangely controlled the ordinary course of nature, Mariana's bodily powers collapsed. The painful feebleness, the labouring breath, the tremulous automatic movements, all told that the hour was at hand.

Hugh Gordon had been watching by her bedside since midnight. He summoned Marguerite. Her approach brought expression to Mariana's dim orbs. After a short interval, she raised Marguerite's hand, in which her own had been clasped, to her lips. Then placing it within Hugh Gordon's palm, a smile of ineffable sweetness glorified the pale face and upturned eyes. Her head sank slowly back. The light faded out of the countenance, yet left a tranquil, fixed look, as of a sleeper.

A deeper silence fell on the senses of the gazers. The awe-stricken hush in which they found themselves seemed an arrest even of time. Sorrowfully their eyes met, and told the mournful truth. Mariana's pure spirit was at rest.

CHAPTER LI

MARGUERITE instinctively felt that in this hour of doom hers was the stronger nature. Fully able to hold his place among his fellow-men in the race or the battle of life as Hugh Gordon had proved himself to be, he was apt to be unmanned in any supreme crisis where his affections were concerned. At such periods women display, in addition to the calmest courage, an organising faculty which in the ruder sex is generally found wanting.

Together the mourners knelt by the side of the dead —of her who had loved both so well—whose fate had been so inexplicably mingled with their lives. Long and earnestly they prayed. Then Marguerite prevailed

upon her companion to retire to his chamber, while she performed the last sad offices.

"I would rather no one approached her but myself," she said; "dear, gentle-souled Mariana. I will close her eyes, and dispose her sweet limbs for their long sleep. Later on I will send for Madame Faucher. No other hands shall touch her."

Once again only on earth did Hugh Gordon behold the fair features of the woman who had been the support of his life in that disastrous period when a flood of despair had engulfed his soul—when but for her sweet influence he would have gone down to the grave in which he deemed that every feeling, hope, and interest which bound him to earth lay buried.

When he again beheld Mariana all that loving care could imagine had been done to retain in death the exquisite delicacy of form and feature which had been in life so remarkable. In that Northern clime, in that stern season, there is a long interval during which the faces of the dead retain their wonted expression, fixed in statuesque calmness,

> "Before decay's effacing fingers
> Have swept the lines where beauty lingers."

The masses of bright hair had been simply combed back from the forehead, not confined in the traditional manner so often employed to render death unseemly and repelling. The marble hue of the calm face gave an ethereal appearance to the exquisitely moulded features, which in death retained the almost infantine air of gentleness which had distinguished Mariana in life.

The day so unspeakably mournful for the survivors at length arrived. The sad procession passed from the house where for many a day the dead and her mourners had dwelt in the enjoyment of so many of the material blessings which this life can afford.

Within a few short years what havoc had been made by the arch-demon Circumstance! To this house had both brides come in the first flush of maiden pride and joy at being the chosen companions of one who stood

high among his fellows in all "that gives the world assurance of a man."

And now to what goal had Fate's iron hand conducted them? One woman was sorrowfully following the other to the house appointed for all living, while the husband, who in all singleness of heart had mourned, almost to the verge of madness, his first bride, was now clothed in sable garb, a mourner and bereaved, while beside him sat the living dead, in the shape of her who had but yesterday returned as from the silent land.

Small wonder that during that sad period Hugh Gordon felt himself to be in a land of dreams and shadows, half unconscious whether in the presence of phantoms or realities.

He was partly recalled from these morbid fancies and imaginings by the voices of his children as they greeted him on his return—"Will poor mamma never come back to us, father, and is this lady to be our mother now?"

"I will be your mother, darling," said Marguerite, lifting the wondering child in her arms. "Mamma has gone to Heaven, and God has sent me to love you always."

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It was now necessary that arrangements should be made and a future course resolved upon. Marguerite proposed to quit England at once for Australia, taking with her the children, of whom henceforth she constituted herself sole guardian and protectress. She would retain the assumed name of Mrs. Mortimer, and rent a house in Sydney as the governess in charge of the family of a deceased cousin.

Hugh Gordon would dispose of his property with the exception of one estate which had for many generations been the inheritance of the eldest son of the house. Of this he would arrange to have the rental transmitted until Alister was in a position to occupy it himself. After an interval of a year or more had elapsed, Hugh Gordon would rejoin his Marguerite in the New World of the South, and under the Southern Cross would their new vows be pronounced.

Since her return, Marguerite had deeply deplored

the absence of her own children, her first-born, Alister, and her heart's darling, Rita; but, for one reason, she was resigned. Alister had, after passing a brilliant examination, been gazetted to his regiment in India, where they had many relatives. The wife of a high Indian official who had retained a loving memory of his mother, on hearing that he had a sister, had sent a most pressing invitation to Rita for a year's visit. As the winter of her native land was thought to be severe for her constitution, Hugh Gordon and Mariana had yielded to her solicitation, and despatched Rita to the land whence Alister had written such glowing descriptions.

This, then, was the explanation of their absence at the time of Mariana's illness, on account of which it was not thought wise to recall them. Alister would in two years get his furlough, which he would spend in Australia, when Rita would accompany him.

On the day following the funeral Hugh Gordon departed for the Continent. Unable to bear the sight of the familiar rooms, the empty chamber, the dark-robed children, he was restless until he quitted the scene of his misery. He gave Marguerite *carte blanche* as to expenses with reference to the projected voyage and establishing of herself in Sydney. He arranged with his agent for the wants of the family—the payment to her order of an income amply sufficient, and, directing him to sell Gordon House and grounds, with all the furniture, directly Marguerite should quit it, left England for a lonely ramble in Spain, where he hoped in course of time to lull the poignancy of regret.

On the same day Marguerite arranged with Madame Faucher to undertake the lodging of herself and the children until the mail steamer should depart, and quitted for ever the house which had witnessed such crushing disasters—which had grown so darkly familiar with sorrow and mourning that it seemed to her now, in the dreary twilight of a fading winter day, the very vestibule of death.

Before the time of embarkation she had long conversations with Madame Faucher as to her future plans and destination.

"You have resolved, then, to return no more. It is

well," said that lady. "What is this England? A tomb, a mausoleum *affreux*, a land of sadness, of gloom, where even the sky weeps itself, *ma foi*, unceasingly. *Vous avez raison.* You go to meet the sun in a summer land, where flowers and fruits grow all the year round—where the seas are calm, the heavens blue. It is the newly-found paradise *ce vieux* Adam was turned out of. We of the earth will all follow you some day. These children, ah! so pale, will then grow and flourish like palm trees."

"The climate will suit them admirably," said Marguerite; "and for me I could have been so happy there, but——"

"But! What is but? There will be no buts in the happy future. Monsieur returns in the year and a day, like the old *romanciers*. *Naturellement*, he marries Mrs. Mortimer; so accomplished is she; so tenderly, so firmly she manages his children. You have thus sacrificed yourself again; is it not so? Well, it is your *metier*; there must be saints and martyrs, or we sinners would have no one to intercede for us with the good God."

"He may permit us a season of consolation in the future when these sorrows have been softened by time," Marguerite replied. "My husband and I are still young; we have been separated; alas! in this world we shall never know why. But we have been true to our trust—we have done our duty in the past. It will brighten our lot in the future. I shall always be thankful, my dear Madame Faucher, that I acted upon your advice, and returned in time to close our beloved Mariana's eyes. I was doubtful, even then, whether I should reveal myself fully. It was the accidental wearing of your sealskin cloak which caused my husband to recognise me. It is wonderfully like the one he last saw me in. Where did you purchase it?"

"Of a truth it was not bought at a shop, but from a distressed demon of a compatriot of mine. Ah! but yes! I considered afterwards that she had probably stolen it. I discovered of her history acts the most dreadful. Do you remember her name? It was Manon Delorge. Her companions had another name for her. But I forget much."

"It was *La Chatte des Bois*," exclaimed Marguerite, shuddering as she pronounced the ill-omened name, which brought back such bitter recollections—the thrill of such unspeakable misery. "It is possible that it may have been my own mantle. Ah! how well I remember the day Hugh placed it on my shoulders with such pride."

"We will soon behold," said madame vivaciously; "she was *voleuse—brigande*, everything of bad that is necessary for a woman."

And madame rushed upstairs with Gallic impetuosity, in a few moments reappearing with the still handsome and carefully preserved garment. It was but little altered after its varied and terrible experience.

"Yes," said Marguerite, opening the folds carefully, almost fearfully. "I cannot be mistaken. This is the very mantle of which I was so proud. Poor Hugh made me walk up and down, and admired me in it to his heart's content. He said that it suited my figure admirably, and that none but tall women should wear furs. Here is my own private mark," and she turned back a half-concealed lappet, where the letters, "M.G." though faded, were still distinct. "I wrote my initials there on the day I left home, in the event of its being necessary. It was this mantle which I lent to poor Lady Delacour, who was killed in the collision. When Hugh recognised it as mine she was buried in my name. Our hair, our height, our appearance had a general resemblance. They told me she had been buried in this mantle."

"She then robbed the dead," said madame, crossing herself with pious horror. "Sacrilegious that she was. *Elle en est capable.* Did she not betray me, traduce me, who saved her from dying of hunger in London! But you will now receive it from me. Sad and precious memorial. Is it not so?"

"You must let me buy you a new one, for I should like to show it to Hugh," said Marguerite, sighing. "Ah me! how little we thought of what was before us the day we parted!"

. . . . . .

Once more in the *Indus*, fortunately available—once

more on the blue and bounding wave beneath a brighter sky. Again parting the tropic seas in the great, gay, populous ocean steamer, Marguerite daily gained strength and cheerful serenity as the land wherein she had known so many sorrows receded and the Britain of the South was daily nearer.

The children were benefited by the change from the darkness and low temperature of the Northern winter to the soft airs and sunny skies of the tropics. They revelled in the liberty and variety of their new life ; were never weary of listening to Marguerite's tales of the beautiful land to which they were speeding. The voyage, commenced under melancholy auspices, was exceptionally free from storm and tempest, and when after a most favourable passage the *Indus* entered the majestic portals of the unrivalled haven, Marguerite hailed with joyful recognition the flower-crowned heights, the mirrored wave, slumbering beneath the pearly mist of a vaporous autumn morn, as the entrance to the good land which had been to her an asylum from care, at once a sanctuary and a home.

Her arrival had been anticipated, and, early as was the hour, the steamer was no sooner within reach of the wharf than Mr. and Mrs. Baldhill arrived in a boat and carried off the whole party to Orara. There the children were transported with delight at the beauty of the surroundings, as well as at the comprehensive breakfast and the fresh fruits with which they were regaled.

"And so you are here again, safe and sound, with your dear children, too," said Mrs. Baldhill, affectionately. "What sweet little things they are. Poor dears! not that they'll miss much for the future; but a mother's a mother. Never mind ; don't say a word for an hour or two. Just sit still and look round and enjoy yourself. How well you're looking, too. But the sea air always did agree with you. Mr. Baldhill thinks you look better than ever. Isabel's away on a visit to Mount Wilson, but she'll be down to-morrow. She's well, but I think she's been studying too hard lately. She doesn't go out much. She's taken a serious fit since last year. Did she tell you Sir John

Danvers proposed to her before he went home, when they came back from New Zealand? She wouldn't have him, though; she said she liked him, and always would, but not in that way; it was a first-rate match, but we're not sorry. We'd like to keep our girl a year or two longer with us, and it would break our hearts if she went to live in England altogether, away from us. We couldn't live there, you know. Too cold, my dear; and Mr. Baldhill would die, I really believe, if he was more than a year or two away from his sheep and stations. Where's Mr. Allerton? Oh, he's at Honolulu, or Tahiti, or somewhere among those islands. He didn't come back from New Zealand with Mr. Stanhope and Sir John Danvers—said he wasn't quite recovered yet, and wanted more change. I think he was more hurt than we thought; don't you? He never quite got over that wound. Perhaps his heart's affected. There's a great deal of that sort of thing nowadays."

"Let us hope he will recover in time," said Marguerite, with less sympathy than the good woman thought the occasion required. "He is young, and not quite tired of life. He has the strong heart which belongs to gifted natures. He will come back to his own land in good time, and settle down into a model country gentleman."

"Well, I should like to see him with a good wife, and a family about her," said the worthy matron. "I declare I'm as fond of him as if he was my own son. There's trouble enough in matrimony, Heaven knows; but a man that isn't married—or a woman either—lives only half a life, to my thinking. But I seem as if I could do nothing but talk and run on. I'm that happy to see you out here again that I hardly know what I'm saying. After breakfast we'll drive over and see the furnished house I've taken for you, by the month, till you get settled. I've got you two capital servants, too. It's Marchmont, that beautiful place in Rose Bay that Mr. Thorndale built just before we came out last. They're at home now, and won't be out till the spring."

"Oh! that lovely place," exclaimed Marguerite. "How delighted I am. Don't you know how Isabel

and I used to admire it, with the rose garden on the sea cliff, and the balcony overhanging the bay. It's like a place in Brittany where I spent a happy summer once. How good of you to take so much trouble."

"Trouble! We'll do anything in the wide world for you, now you've come back to live amongst us. I expect Isabel will be quite a new girl, bless her!"

Marguerite took possession of her new home before nightfall, and Isabel came rushing down after breakfast to demonstrate her transports in person.

"Oh! I am resigned to existence now. I am satisfied with my destiny," she exclaimed, in the intervals between her embraces. "I began to think that I should have nothing to look forward to in life but the Children's Hospital, where I've spent half my time lately. Now you are back again life seems to have brightened all of a sudden. And are you going to live here always?"

"Always, my darling Isabel, as far as we can judge. It will take very serious reasons to dissever me from Sydney again."

"And oh! what dear little children, what delicate mites! They put me in mind of the 'Non Angli, sed Angeli' darlings. So these are your poor cousins! How fortunate that you were able to get back in time!"

"But for your good father, I could hardly have managed that. I shall be grateful all my days. But it is one of the many debts to your family, dear child, which we hope partly to repay in the future."

"You have a hundred times repaid us for anything we could do," said Isabel, excitedly. "What should I have been if I had never known you? A spoiled, half-educated, fanciful creature, with hardly an idea beyond dances and dresses, like so many of the poor things I see here; a thoughtless trifler in youth, a discontented complainer in age."

"Whereas now," said Marguerite, smiling, "if Khartoum were only relieved and Gordon safe, we should be perfectly happy, and devote ourselves to good works and ennobling duties for the rest of our days."

"Khartoum is all but relieved. General Herbert Stewart gained a victory over the Arabs," replied the girl, joyfully. "Lord Wolseley has the Mahdi in the hollow of his hand. We are expecting fuller news daily."

"And so all our pleasant friends have gone?" said Marguerite. "Mr. Stanhope, that nice Sir John, and Mr. Allerton; where is he?"

"How should I know?" replied Isabel. "He writes to mother now and again, but he never seems to wish to come back"; and here a rising sob was with difficulty suppressed, as she threw her arms round her friend's neck and leaned her head on her shoulder in childlike fashion as of old.

"We must abide God's good time," said Marguerite, gently. "Wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thy heart's desire. As long as my girl does her duty and preserves her faith in the justice of a merciful Father, no evil will have power to harm her. And now let us explore this beautiful house. *My house!* which I am never tired of admiring. Was there ever a more perfect view than from this balcony?"

. . . . . .

But little more remains to be told. Marguerite Gordon's destiny was so far fulfilled that no malign forces were suffered to invade her future path. Surrounded by friends and admiring acquaintances whom her unpretending yet dignified character never failed to attract—happy in the care of the children whom she had taken to her heart—she calmly awaited the day when her husband should rejoin her and the cup of mortal happiness be filled to overflowing.

That event took place in little more than the year of mourning due to the memory of Mariana. Hugh Gordon, having realised his property in England, found himself in possession of an income which amply sufficed for the needs of a cultured, unconventional mode of life, such as they both were agreed in thinking to be the *summum bonum* of existence. Mr. Baldhill even persuaded him to make a few guarded investments which would safely add to his already considerable capital.

Bruce Allerton arrived at length from an exhaustive tour—which had, indeed, even included New Guinea—wave-tossed and sun-browned, even more tanned than amid the wanderings in the desert, where he had so nearly found a grave. His collections afforded endless interest to Mr. Gordon's scientific soul, and in that gentleman he recognised a kindred spirit. Mr. Allerton was apparently even more changed in mental than in physical attributes, inasmuch as he speedily set at rest all doubts on the subject of his matrimonial intentions which might have been entertained by his fair compatriots, among whom he had been for many reasons an object of considerable interest, by declaring in form to Isabel, and arranging for as early a date as was consistent with indispensable preliminaries. That he was happy, no student of human nature will doubt who has noted the result of unions where the fresh, pure heart of a high-minded, loving girl is delivered into the keeping of a man of stainless honour and generous disposition. They were happy—supremely, consciously, undeniably happy. Whether in after years they passed the glorious Southern winter in peaceful enjoyment of their country home, or returned during the too ardent summer to the wave-washed promontory which had sounded Isabel's earliest lullaby, no mortal man (or woman) noticed the trace of a wish ungratified, of a hope unfulfilled in Bruce Allerton's cheerful, manly countenance. Still less could one have doubted that the handsome, stately matron into whom Isabel developed spared a moment for regret or *ennui* from the management of her household, with its troop of happy, healthy boys and girls, and her befitting social duties.

More than once had Bruce Allerton confessed with heartfelt thanks to Marguerite that she had known far better than he himself how to secure his true happiness, his enduring good. For the superfluous energy, the demonstratively high spirits that were ever bubbling over in Isabel's happy girlhood, were but the natural outcome of a fearless, richly-endowed nature, unrestrained by conventionality, yet pure, unselfish, and capable of emulating the deeds of the loftiest exemplars of her sex. Now the occasionally rebellious forces,

causing limited natures to shrink and disapprove, were merged in the absorbing maternal tenderness which a happy union had developed.

"I am aware that I was not your first or your only love, Bruce," she remarked on more than one occasion; "but you love me and me only now, darling; don't you? That is all I care about. It will be my fault if you love any one else for the time to come."

No one who saw Bruce Allerton in his happy home with the second Isabel climbing upon his knees and the eldest boy Gordon, already possessed of a pony and aware of the difference between catch-weight and weight for age, would have considered the contingency probable.

. . . . .

And when the day arrived—the half-desired, half-dreaded day—when for the second time Hugh Gordon stood at the altar with the bride of his youth, how strangely solemn and sweet a moment was it. Such was the course taken as necessary to avoid the comments of the curious, to shield Mariana's memory, to remove reproach from her innocent children. The promise had been made as she lay on her death-bed. It had soothed her dying moments; and both Hugh Gordon and his wife found relief in conforming rigidly to it.

And did her second nuptials bring to Marguerite the rapture, the unquestioning love and total absorption of one being in another which crown the bridal of those whose inmost hearts throb in unison? Much had intervened—another life, another love had come and gone since first she had rested in her lover's arms, a happy bride, glad with the triumph of pure, fresh girlhood.

Yet was their later love, assured as they were that no obstacle now interrupted the free course of the warmest affection, scarcely less passionately enthralling than in the days of the buried past. Both had been purified in the furnace of affliction. Weighed in the balance, Marguerite had not been found wanting. Through sorrow and weakness, misery and despair, she had kept "the bird in her bosom." She had been

faithful to the love of man, to the faith of God. Loyal to the gentle being who had unwittingly usurped her place, she had not resented her husband's seeming infidelity—the constancy of his heart to the dead. And now she was to reap her reward. As her husband, the long-lost lover of her youth, pressed her to his heart she recognised the truth of the immortal promise—"Come to Me, all ye that are weak and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"—she was to receive her reward on earth. The deliverer had come, bringing precious sheaves with him.

Mr. Baldhill carried out the promise, as was his wont, of providing for Alphonse and Marie. He raised his salary annually, as he developed fresh capacity, and finally advanced him sufficient capital to purchase a wool-scouring establishment, with machinery, in the successful working of which large profits were to be made, and in which his scientific, specialised knowledge would insure him an easy victory over competitors.

The girl Ayesha contracted a liking for civilised Australian life. Being teachable and a Christian, she improved much under Isabel's tuition. She eventually married a fair-bearded, rising young overseer of Mr. Baldhill's, who upon one of his rare excursions "down the country," being "fetched," as he expressed it, by Ayesha's wondrous eyes and willowy form, asked the momentous question without notice, and received a satisfactory answer. They went after the honeymoon trip to an extremely warm locality on the Queensland border, which in all desert essentials—camels and Arabs excepted—must have reminded Ayesha of the Soudan.

Gholab after a time—much doubting between his duty to Zohrab and Zuleika and his affection for his family—decided to return *viâ* Aden, to which historic locality he was accordingly shipped. The horses were entrusted to Ayesha and her husband at Outer Back Murgah, where in a few years several true descendants of the prophet's immortal steeds might have been seen in the home paddock. The spotted sheep and the gazelles were likewise relegated to this far-away lodge in the wilderness, where in the after time quite an Arab

colony appeared to have grown up. On great occasions Zohrab was solemnly led down to Allerton Hall, as the principal estate was named, for the delectation of Mrs. Allerton, who always managed to get up a riding party, and show off her beloved steed, either in her own person or by causing him to be ridden by the best horsewoman of the party. The gazelles also seemed to find the saline herbage and dry, warm climate of Outer Back Murgah suitable to their constitutions. Visitors are never tired of admiring the "soft, dark eye," and the well-known lines are frequently quoted.

Hugh Gordon and his wife had been settled for a year in their new home when the Indian mail brought a letter from Alister. He and his sister Rita might be expected in Sydney by the next steamer. What words can describe the rapture with which Marguerite received the intelligence! Her brave, her beautiful boy—her first-born—the child of tears of joy—of unutterable love—of boundless gratitude to Heaven for the priceless gift—all the passionately mingled feelings of maternity filled her head and oppressed her brain. And Rita! the softened image of her father, with his love of literature, his contemplative nature—and ardent faith—how should she bear the happiness which was in store for her? And yet again, a complication arose. Were they acknowledged as the children of their first—their only marriage—legally, how explain to the world—to the younger children, their true position? For one moment she repined at the necessity for concealment; but when she saw the fair innocent faces of Mariana's babies, and recalled her last look of grateful love, she checked the involuntary thought.

As Alister and his sister were of age to comprehend the nature of the case, it was decided that they should be fully informed of all the circumstances.

They met; the orphaned children, the mother so long mourned as dead. Can words describe the deep unutterable joy which beamed in every eye, which found relief in cries, in sobs, in uncontrolled weeping? But they *were* tears of joy. For when the young creatures learned that they had unwittingly shared her tenderness as "madame" during the life of Mariana, they de-

clared that instinctively they must have divined that she was their real mother.

To preserve the existing family arrangement it was assumed that Alister and his sister were the children of Mrs. Gordon by a former marriage. This was true in fact, and was received with unquestioning acquiescence by the society of the day. Hugh Gordon and his wife were too popular and too valuable as component parts thereof for idle curiosity to receive encouragement to criticise their private affairs. In due time Alister returned to India, whence from time to time he "ran down" as he expressed himself, to freshen up and lay in constitution for another dose of Indian ills. On one of these occasions he brought a brother officer, sore wounded in a skirmish with the tribesmen of the frontier, whose mild heroism and amiable qualities so impressed Rita that she followed him and his fortunes to "Morningland."

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And now the restful, happy days for the long-parted pair passed in an Elysium of peace, of unvarying contentment, of that perfect love which casteth out fear.

Then it so chanced one day that they had been invited by the admiral of a French squadron, making some short stay at the Australian station, to go on board a transport which had called in on her way to Noumea. She carried with her a number of female *récidivistes*. Marguerite did not care to behold anything so painful; but Hugh Gordon wished to send a message connected with botanical science to an acquaintance on the island. The rest of the party were eagerly curious.

As Marguerite had anticipated, the sight was painful and repulsive. Caged within iron compartments, the wretched women, physically well-cared-for, looked less like human beings than fierce animals confined in a menagerie. Unsexed, evil of aspect, presenting every type of criminal instinct, reckless of speech and manner, they constituted a sight unspeakably revolting. Saddened and repelled by a sight so opposed to her every instinct, Marguerite was about to withdraw, when she was attracted by a woman, whom the Sister of Charity,

moving among these ruined natures like an angel of pity in the lowest pit of the Inferno, was addressing in mild reproof.

The woman suddenly turned, her fierce eyes gleaming like those of a tigress in their hollow caverns. There was an instantaneous recognition. It was *La Chatte des Bois*.

"It is you, then," said she, with an intonation that was almost a growl. "What *la sœur* tells me is probably true. There is a God who rewards and punishes. You are in heaven—restored to *him*—is it not so?—while I am in hell."

"Then, *par hasard*, you have formerly known Manon, whom her companions call *La Chatte?*" said the Sister of Charity in her soft voice, speaking also in French, as she perceived that Marguerite understood the words of the *récidiviste*.

"I knew this unhappy woman many years ago," replied Marguerite. "She was a nurse in a hospital in which I was unhappily a patient in consequence of a terrible accident. What will be her position in Noumea?"

"She will have an opportunity of reforming," said the sister. "Let us hope she will see the necessity of turning to the Saviour—to the Holy Virgin, who will soften her heart, if she prays to her."

"Are there any means of procuring her indulgences in the shape of food, of little articles of dress, for instance?" And here Marguerite took out her purse. "I should like to do something for her. Is it permitted to give to you in trust for her?"

"She will enjoy a restricted freedom after a period of probation," said the sister, "dependent always upon good conduct and submission to rules. Then a few Louis d'or may be useful."

"Perhaps *la sœur* will oblige me by taking charge of these in her interest," said Marguerite, as she looked with sorrowful pity upon her enemy, now reduced to an abject condition of degradation which might well have satisfied the most revengeful mind. With a last gaze at the hard face of *La Chatte*, she handed her purse, with its contents, to the sister.

At this proof of womanly compassion and forgiveness, the features of the criminal underwent a sudden and wonderful change. The face softened, the fierce regard disappeared, and was replaced by a look which seemed to have returned from the recesses of lost years; tears stood in the savage, glittering eyes as she fell on her knees and stretched her hand imploringly towards Marguerite through the grating.

"You have conquered," she said, in a broken voice. "You have returned good for evil. I did not believe there were people like you in the world. It was in your power to exult over me. That is how the people of my world treat their enemies, and I that persecuted you without a cause—without a cause! But I will repay you for your gold. Henceforth I will change, I swear it. That is how the children of *le bon Dieu* wish to be repaid. *La sœur* will write to you of me. Is it not so?"

"I will do so without fail, Manon," said the sister. "You will afford me good news to send. And, madame," she continued, bowing with graceful humility, "will permit me to thank her for the support she has afforded to my exhortations by her generosity, by her holy act of Christian charity."

"It would not be fair to our unfortunate compatriots," said the admiral, now stepping forward, and bowing low with true French gallantry to the sister, "to permit Madame Gordon to be the only contributor. Permit me to present my small offering in so good a cause."

The remainder of the party here insisted upon performing their part, the result of which was that the good sister had received a considerable addition to her fund, and the companions of Manon had cause to bless the day when Marguerite Gordon's foot pressed the deck of their floating prison.

. . . . . .

"We leave behind us the last link which binds us to that time of lamentation and woe," said Hugh Gordon, as from their fast-receding boat they watched the heavy outlines and sombre colouring of the prison ship.

"I wonder that you could find it in your heart to forgive that fiend Manon. I cannot, I own."

"We are commanded to forgive our enemies," said Marguerite, softly. "And you should not think too hardly of her, Hugh, as through her dishonesty she enabled you to recognise me on the night of my return in the Sealskin Cloak.

THE END

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